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Revitalizing Tier 2 Intervention with Graphic Novels

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Abstract

The authors explore the practice of incorporating graphic novels in a Tier 2 Response To Intervention (RTI) program for five elementary-aged struggling readers in an urban school. Using a formative experiment framework, the study found that graphic novels provided a vehicle for the application of word recognition and fluency strategies learned in the RTI intervention program. In addition, graphic novels were used to develop students' vocabulary and comprehension skills and resulted in increased progress for students' fluency as measured by DIBELS. Since graphic novels are not grade level specific, they are appropriate for readers across grades. As a genre, graphic novels can also provide a scaffold for students in the development of literacy skills.

Introduction and Setting

Jason sits on the floor reading his graphic novel. His eyes dart across the page looking at the pictures in the panels and the text in the speech and thought bubbles. The sounds and actions of the characters capture his attention and his posture and facial expressions reflect a deep absorption in his reading.

"I can do this," he murmurs to himself as he begins to read.

"She nur-tur-ed the dr-eam-ing by en cir-cling the wor-ld and h-old-ing her tail..."

He read a second time less hesitantly.

“Ok...she nurtured the dreaming by encircling the world and holding her tail...”

Then he read it again, more confidently.

“She nurtured the dreaming by encircling the world and holding her tail...”

He took a deep breath and continued reading.

Once.

“The locust was a night mare creature without shape or form who could exist only in the spirit world...”

Twice.

“The locust was a night mare creature without shape or form who could exist only in the spirit world.”

A third time.

“The locust was a nightmare creature without shape or form who could exist only in the spirit world.”

After reading the page in its entirety, he closed his eyes and thought for a minute.

“I think that something terrible is going to happen. The locust is evil and the word nurture means something good. I wonder if there will be a fight between good and evil.”

Jason is a 5th grade student in a Tier 2 Response To Intervention (RTI) program at an urban school in Northern California. He does not qualify for funded remedial instruction services; however, he has made limited progress toward building fluent and grade-appropriate reading skills. Jason is not alone; there are others in his intervention instruction group who share similar difficulties. They have not made the transition to effective, fluent reading; they are unable to effectively decode multisyllabic words and often revert to decoding on an onset-rime or word family basis (Allington, 2005; National Reading Panel, 2000; Farstrup & Samuels, 1992).

Jason and those in his intervention group lack substantive prior experiences with print; their vocabulary is restricted to simple words, those Tier I words that are found in spoken vocabulary (Beck, McKeowan, & Kucan, 2002). As a result, reading

fluency is significantly below benchmark. In addition, their meaning vocabulary is limited and this limited vocabulary impacts their comprehension of text (Hart & Risley, 1995). These students do not have academic Tier 2 vocabulary, that which is often needed for the comprehension of the content of school curriculum (Beck et al., 2002).

Two other factors impact many of these students' abilities to develop age-appropriate skills. First, the students are not able to apply what they have learned into authentic contexts as they mainly read the controlled texts that accompany the published intervention program. In contrast, they revert to inefficient reading behaviors when reading authentic materials. Second, the students do not see themselves as real readers and thus do not want to read (Stanovich, 1986). As a result, they limit their reading to what they are obliged to read in the intervention program. Since the students are not reading outside of the intervention class, they lack exposure to the rich vocabulary, complex text structures, and diverse ideas gathered from wide reading as well as the opportunities to read meaningful material until fluency is reached (Kuhn & Schwanenflugel, 2006).

The school's Response to Intervention (RTI) program is a combination of the standard protocol and the problem solving approach (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), aligned with the requirements set forth in No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). The Tier 2 instructional program targets those students who require more systematic, specific, and intensive instruction than provided as a part of the general education classroom program. Meeting identified student needs forms the foundation for the development of the intervention. Therefore, several sources of materials compose the core of instruction. Intervention materials come from those on the district-approved list and are identified as scientifically and/or evidenced based. The intervention teacher and primary researcher is a credentialed reading specialist who also holds credentials for teaching students with learning disabilities. She is familiar with the mandates of Tier 2 instruction and has written on this topic (Smetana, 2010a).

Progress-monitoring data obtained through fluency checks using the district-mandated program Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS; Good & Kaminski, 2006), indicate that the students are developing reading skills. While students' fluency improves with the controlled texts their progress is limited, but not due to the lack of skill development. Students can easily apply the decoding strategies in isolated contexts, in the special materials, but effective application to more authentic texts in the general education classroom context eludes them.

Tier 2 intervention is considered strategic and intensive; students need to learn reading strategies to enable them to reach a level of competency where they can return to Tier 1 intervention. These particular students, as observed by the author, are learning slowly, but are not making the progress needed to return to the classroom-based Tier 1 intervention. Failure to make appropriate progress in the Tier 2 intervention program will lead to more intense intervention and a potential referral for special education services. As a result, the intervention teacher realized that while the current Tier 2 program was addressing the cognitive aspects of reading, it was not addressing the affective aspects of reading, including motivation and engagement (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001).

Until these students see themselves as readers and are motivated to read, skills developed during tiered instruction may not result in increased academic competency (Guthrie, 2001; Wigfield, 2004). When students do not read, their problems are aggravated and magnified (Guthrie & Knowles, 2001; Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner, 2002). Therefore, the intervention program needs to provide opportunities for students to feel successful about the act of reading, instilling confidence, which in turn allows them to see reading as enjoyable, furthering their desire to read for pleasure (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999).

In light of the students' lack of progress, the existing Tier 2 intervention plan was evaluated (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005), and it was determined that augmented opportunities for practice of skills learned were required. Students needed to be able to see that the reading skills they were developing had a place in their lives. The opportunity for students to make this connection, using their skills for authentic reading, is essential.

Enhancing the Content of the Tier 2 Program

The intervention teacher reviewed additional instructional materials prepared by publishers specifically for Tier 2 intervention programs and high interest books written for struggling readers. Samples of the publisher-prepared books and other materials were shared with the students. Unfortunately, student response was unenthusiastic. "Oh, more reading materials, yeah," Miranda said sarcastically as she left the learning center one afternoon.

Successful reading experiences are essential in order to promote student's growth in reading (Pressley, 2002). Graves, Juel, and Graves (1998) identify three

features of successful experiences. The first feature is that the reader understands the text. The second is that the experience is enjoyable, entertaining, thought provoking, or informative. The final feature is that the reading experience prepares the students to complete the required task that takes place after the reading. Understanding this, the intervention teacher was seeking captivating, motivating literature for the Tier 2 intervention program.

Over the past three years the intervention teacher has read graphic novels for students and adults and has incorporated graphic novels in several instructional contexts (Smetana, 2010a, 2010b; Smetana, Odelson, Burns, & Grisham, 2009) and she found herself captivated by their use of visual elements and text and the rich, descriptive language. Perhaps incorporating graphic novels into the Tier 2 program could provide students with the motivation to improve reading. The graphic novels “would provide students with engaging, different material that they can read and want to read” (Moore, Bean, Birdshaw, & Rycik, 1999, p. 4). Proponents find that graphic novels are effective as a genre because “the more you read, the better you get, the more you like it; and the more you like it the more you do it” (Trelease, 2001, p. 1; Smetana et al., 2009; Frey, 2010; Smetana, 2010b). “If educators are serious about developing students’ lifelong love of reading, they need to incorporate in the curriculum literature that is captivating and issue-based” (Bean, 2002, p. 37).

A Review of the Research

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels, based on comics, are full-length books, many containing stories previously presented in serialized form across many comic book issues. Each graphic novel tells a story with words and drawings and has an identifiable beginning, middle, and end (Eisner, 1985; Cary, 2004; McCloud & Lappan, 1999). Although the textual demands of graphic novels are less than those in traditional texts, graphic novels should not be considered easy reading as the structure of sentences and vocabulary in graphic novels is complex; readers need to make meaning from the visual clues and text presented (Smetana et al., 2009; Frey, 2010).

There is little research that links graphic novels with the building of literacy skills for students with learning disabilities. Perhaps this is because only 4% of teachers in grades K-12 incorporate graphic novels into their curriculum (McTaggart, 2008). Graphic novels appeal to struggling readers for many reasons. Struggling readers are often not able to visualize what they are reading (Hibbling

& Rankin-Erickson, 2003). When reading a novel, regardless of the vivid language and descriptive passages, many cannot put images into or visualize the material. The graphic novel presents content through the use of sequential pictures, word balloons, and captions. The graphic visual images support the text and allow the reader to focus on meaning in order to comprehend the story. Students create meaning through the interpretation of images first and then move to the text (Bylsma, 2007; Kan, 2006). In order to understand the graphic novel, readers must be “actively engaged in the process of decoding and comprehending a range of literary devices, including narrative structures, metaphor and symbolism, point of view, and the use of puns and alliteration, intertextuality, and inference” (Crawford & Weiner, 2006, p. 5). “The dramatically reduced text and authentic language make them manageable and language profitable for even beginning level readers” (Carey, 2004, p. 15).

Graphic novels also use natural language to tell stories as opposed to the stilted, artificial language of controlled readers or controlled vocabulary stories (Cary, 2004). Students are more likely to be engaged readers when they read authentic literature that is meaningful and uses rich, natural language (Goodman, 1986; Graves, 2002; Smith, 2003). When students are engaged they are more likely to read and write, participate in discussions, and make meaningful connections than nonengaged readers. Thus, students’ fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension may be increased. Graphic novels are also appealing because the books themselves are different in format from the texts and basal readers often used during classroom instruction and from the fiction books found in the school library. The structure of the graphic novel, blending art and text, and the excitement and sophistication of the stories, motivates students to read and engages their attention. When successful, these students may continue to read for pleasure (Smetana et al., 2009; Smetana, 2010b).

Struggling Readers

Struggling readers tend to avoid reading as they are below grade level in reading skills and have poor self-esteem when seeing themselves as readers (Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Lazarus & Callahan, 2000). Such readers often dislike reading and may avoid reading except when forced to read and thus, they do not become better readers. Many students do not read their assignments; rather, they wait for someone to explain the materials (personal communication, fifth grade teacher, Ms. Wolsey, May 2010).

When struggling readers read, they also often find that the word recognition and decoding demands of text, without visual images, are challenging. As a result, students spend their energy decoding rather than constructing meaning. The reduced amount of text in combination with intense visual images and attention grabbing graphics of the graphic novel may help the struggling reader infer, predict, reflect, and construct meaning in what they read. As a result, struggling readers are building skills when considering characters, emotions, plot, action, setting, symbolism, dialog, captions, commentary, and the facial expressions of the characters in the story (Cary, 2004).

McTaggart (2008) states, “it is important that we make kids want to read before we make them read what we want them to read” (p. 32). When students want to read, they have improved comprehension skills and may be more successful. Motivation for reading often begins with the perception that one is capable of successfully completing a task. This idea of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) begins with the belief that we influence our own choices, effort, and ability to stay with a difficult task. Bandura (1986) stresses that opportunities in the classroom to master material and build self-confidence greatly influence perceptions of self-efficacy. Guthrie (2001) adds that it is the self-perceived capabilities of the reader that impact the perception of self-efficacy. According to Gambrell and Marinak (2009), mastery experiences occur when a student believes that the effort put forth has led to a successful encounter. Consequently, when children are efficacious, they will more likely be successful readers.

Engaged readers are those who utilize their reading strategies for comprehension and knowledge and who are motivated to learn and achieve (Guthrie, 2000). Such students also consider reading a gratifying activity and choose to read (Guthrie, 2001; Irvin, Meltszer, & Dukes, 2007; Oldfather, Dahl, & Educational Resources Information Center, 1994; Turner, 1995). Additional elements of engagement, including believing in one’s skills, taking responsibility, purpose setting, and understanding the text, lead to successful literacy experiences (Cambourne, 1995; Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996). Engagement leads to sustained interaction and practice with the intent to achieve. Thus, engaged readers are motivated, strategic, knowledgeable, and socially interactive (Guthrie, McGough, Bennet & Rice, 1996; Guthrie & Cox, 1998; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Guthrie, 2004). Motivating instruction includes real world interactions, support, and strategies to develop student autonomy and independence (Guthrie, 2000). From an instructional perspective, motivation

and engagement in reading requires that students read interesting texts, participate in strategy instruction sequences, set reachable goals, and receive meaningful feedback (Guthrie, 2000).

Interesting texts support the motivational process needed for the persistence required for reaching skill mastery. Graphic novels, which many consider to be more interesting, may also be perceived as less threatening than conventional texts. Interesting texts, often missing in intervention programs, may provide a compelling reason for students to read. During the reading process, students make connections with the author through the words, and in the case of graphic novels, through complex visuals (Lyga, 2004; McTaggart, 2005). The illustrations in graphic novels provide the visual cues for understanding multidimensional plots. Sylvester (1995) notes that students will learn more when they attend to the materials, and they will attend more if emotionally connected to the materials. Graphic novels may provide for more relevant emotional connections through the pictures and other elements of the writer's craft. In addition, when texts are interesting, students want to share them with their peers. The resulting community of learners leads to increased motivation to read (Morrow, 1996). When students read, their skills improve and more reading leads to deeper comprehension. These successful experiences may lead to motivated and engaged readers. Harkening back to McTaggart (2005), graphic novels are engaging and bring reluctant and struggling readers into the reading process.

Strategy instruction encompasses the explicit teaching of behaviors that lead to effective reading and comprehension of text and that instruction includes modeling, scaffolding, and direct explanations of the application of the skills (Duffy et al., 1987; Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). However, strategy instruction without application is meaningless. It is in the application of the strategies to authentic materials that students integrate these strategies into their set of reading behaviors. The strategies thus become vehicles for the completion of important tasks, such as the task of obtaining meaning. When successful in implementing the strategies, students ultimately develop self-confidence as readers (Pressley, 1997).

Incorporating Graphic Novels into the Tier 2 Intervention Program

In Tier 2 instruction, fidelity to the instructional process and identified strategies is essential. Therefore, care must be taken when incorporating supplemental

materials that are outside of the approved program. Based on prior successes (Smetana, 2010b), it was determined that graphic novels would be incorporated into the intervention lessons and would replace some materials used for skill practice. The intervention teacher requested and gained the principal's approval for integration of graphic novels into the intervention program. The use of graphic novels took place over the spring 2010 quarter of instruction.

The incorporation of graphic novels did not begin as a research project, rather as an opportunity to incorporate some new material into the Tier 2 intervention program. However, it became a study as the intervention teacher struggled with apparent antithetical goals: first, engaging student readers; second, fidelity to the structured environment; third, thirty-minute instructional periods. In the end, the effort to achieve maximum benefit from the process of incorporating graphic novels became a formative experimental study (Reinking & Watkins, 2000).

Since students in this study participate in a Tier 2 intervention program, they had already been identified as struggling learners; therefore, each lesson needed to provide skill development and reading practice. Increased motivation to read was an equally important objective. In each of the thirty-minute intervention periods, the students participated in a lesson that incorporated strategies for decoding, sight word acquisition, fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension. The intervention sessions included direct instruction, guided reading, and independent practice. Not all components of literacy instruction were found in each lesson. Before incorporating the graphic novels into the instructional program, the intervention teacher reviewed several books on teaching with comics, graphic novels, and other visual media (Behler, 2006; Cary, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Thompson, 2008). These texts became resource material for the lessons.

Beginning the Process

Graphic novels were incorporated into the intervention program to develop specific skills that complement and extend the Tier 2 instruction. The guidelines for implementing effective secondary intervention (Vaughn & Denton, 2008) provided the framework for the graphic novels study. It was essential that the graphic novels support, not compete with, the prescribed Tier 2 intervention program. Thus, the graphic novels instruction was created to focus on the development of skills that would lead students to be stronger readers (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Incorporation of Graphic Novels into Instruction (weeks one and two)*

Direct Instruction	Publisher Material (additional materials for group and independent practice)	Graphic Novel (replaced publisher material)
Decoding including multisyllabic words	Stories from REWARDS (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2006) that accompanied the specific reading selection	Read chapters from <i>Bone</i> (Smith, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009); articulated strategies; examined syllable patterns in words; used word building strategies to create new words
Phrase reading	Great Leaps (Campbell, nd) phrases that were read in isolation (e.g., they can have, until he came)	Read speech bubbles and think bubbles; focus on prosody and expression
Sight words	1000 Instant Words: The Most Common Words for Reading and Spelling (Fry, 2000)	Identified words from sight word list that demonstrated to students the number of sight words in authentic text
Comprehension	100 - 200 word passages followed by publisher comprehension questions and incorporated who, what, when, where, why, how questions	Students responded to questions following reading of selected pages of text
Fluency	Leveled passages from Six Minute Solution (Adams & Brown, 2003); Great Leaps (Campbell, nd); Read Naturally (Ihnot, C. & Ihnot, T. 1991)	Oral reading based on characters and speed
Vocabulary	Worksheets that included context clues, graphic organizers, synonyms/antonyms/homonyms, word sorts, roots and affixes	Context to determine meaning of vocabulary, listed synonyms/antonyms /homonyms, Generated new words for identified words

The skills and strategies taught using graphic novels were the same as the strategies incorporated in the selections of the published series' text. The intervention teacher also mapped specific skills to each graphic novel to match mandated skills to be taught or practiced. There was no pacing guide for the graphic novels.

After two weeks, the intervention teacher noticed that the students still seemed to be reading without interest, enthusiasm, or motivation. One day after reading an exciting session where Fone Bone (Smith, 2005), is cornered by giant rats, one of the students exclaimed, "I thought that these books would be different. They are, but we read them just like the other books and papers." Upon further conversation with the student, the intervention teacher found that the students thought the books were great and interesting, but they remained associated with the Tier 2 teacher-led instruction. The students did not recognize that graphic novels are different as they thought that the graphic novels were just another text to read.

Phase 2

As a result of these conversations, the third week brought about a change in the use of graphic novels in the intervention program. A number of studies (Crawford, 2004; Kerr & Culhane, 2000; McTaggart, 2005; Schwarz, 2002) found that graphic novels are motivating and are perceived by students as different from other presented literature. However, because of the mechanical manner in which the graphic novels were taught and used in the preceding lessons, the somewhat subversive attributes of the graphic novel (Kerr & Culhane, 2000; Ezarik, 2003; Thompson, 2008) appeared to be buried in the context of instruction.

In a formative experiment, the researcher is actively engaged with the participants that may result in change (Jiménez, 1997). Jacob (1992) highlights that formative experiments may be initiated to improve instruction by incorporating qualitative methods of investigation and interventions in learning situations. Thus a change in instruction or intervention may take place as a result of the evidence and data collected during the target time period. The intervention teacher changed the organization of the Tier 2 intervention sessions when the evidence indicated that the students were making minimal progress. Although it was important that the skill component of the Tier 2 intervention be continued, it was also important that the students had opportunities to really read the graphic novels and not see the novels as connected to the intervention lessons. Therefore, the intervention teacher determined that the graphic novel needed to be disassociated from the

formal instructional component of the intervention lesson. Graphic novel instruction would be less structured than in weeks one and two, and would support the instructional strategies presented in the prior day's mandated lesson (see Table 2). Graphic novels were the first part of the lesson; direction instruction was the second part of the lesson. Monday's direct instruction strategies were practiced in Tuesday's graphic novel session and each graphic novel session would begin with a mini-review of material from the previous day.

Table 2. *Incorporation of Graphic Novels into Instruction (weeks three and four)*

Direct Instruction (second part of the lesson)	Graphic Novels (first part of the lesson, reviewed strategies from prior instruction)
Decoding including multi-syllabic words	Read chapters from the <i>Bone</i> series (Smith, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009); students articulated strategy used in word identification process
Phrase reading	Read speech bubbles and think bubbles; focused on prosody and expression and speakers roles
Sight words	Identified words from sight word list; linked to words in authentic text
Comprehension	Teacher and student generated questions following reading of selected pages of text; Students participated in retellings; predictions, understanding characters attributes, dispositions, and motives for actions
Fluency	Oral reading based on characters, speed, intonation; taking the parts of the characters
Vocabulary	Use of visual clues and context to determine meaning of vocabulary; Generated new words for identified words

During the second two weeks, the students came to the intervention program asking about the graphic novels. What were they going to read today? They discussed the events of the prior day's reading and made predictions about the events that might take place in the selection for that day. Collin and Jason particularly enjoyed syllabating and stretching out the pronunciation of the long words that they had learned. However, ending the graphic novel reading in order to have time for the targeted intervention instruction became problematic. The students did not want to stop reading and return to more traditional instruction. Based on these observations, another change in the organization of the Tier 2 instruction was needed.

Phase 3

In this phase (weeks five through eight) of the formative experiment, the content for the intervention sessions was constructed on a weekly rather than a daily basis. On two days, Monday and Tuesday, the students read graphic novels supported by instructional strategy activities (see Appendix A). The instruction for the graphic novels followed the model of guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001) and incorporated the use of literature circles (Daniels, 2002) and reader response (Rosenblatt & Progressive Education Association, 1938). Since the students had the full period (30 minutes) for reading, they were able to engage in deeper discussions. The lessons began with a mini-review of new strategies. Lessons integrated these strategies, but students moved through the text reading on their own or with a partner. Decoding of multisyllabic words was embedded into the oral reading of the graphic novel. Phrase reading was authentic as the students read the speech and think bubbles with expression and sight words were read as they arose in the text. Comprehension was developed through interaction with the content. Students completed retellings, examined character actions in light of the elements of the story, and made and confirmed or rejected predictions. The gutters on the pages also provided natural stopping points for discussion. Fluency was developed ‘just in time’ as the students read and reread more. Students read the material with the intonation and prosody appropriate for the specific character, carrying out paired and partner readings, choral, and radio reading of the text. Vocabulary instruction was supported by the visual nature of the text and the detailed images helped students gain meaning from unfamiliar words. Students created their own text and dialog, incorporating new vocabulary to accompany wordless panels.

On three days, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, the Tier 2 instruction proceeded without graphic novels (see Appendix B). Instruction included: decoding using the REWARDS Program (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2006), phrase reading using the Great Leaps program (Campbell, nd), passage reading using the REWARDS Program (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2006), and sight words taken from a list that contains the most common 1000 words for reading, writing, and spelling (Fry, 2000). Students’ comprehension was practiced through answering multilevel questions after reading a selection. Fluency was charted through timed readings and vocabulary was linked to the passages used for comprehension through context and word usage. By disassociating the graphic novels from teacher-led intervention, the intervention teacher hypothesized that students would be more energized by

reading graphic novels. The graphic novels would provide students with opportunities to apply the strategies that they were learning, and student reading would be more natural. Additional instruction was embedded into the reading of the graphic novels. Although graphic novel days did not contain the structure of the remainder of the week's lessons, the instruction using the graphic novels incorporated peer interaction and discussion, embedded skills instruction, support for extending instruction, and a focus on comprehension and critical thinking skills (Vaughn & Denton, 2008).

Findings

Every two weeks the intervention teacher used the district mandated DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2006) progress-monitoring grade level passages to conduct fluency checks on the students in the Tier 2 intervention program. At the beginning of the year, Jason and his Tier 2 intervention peers were reading between 75 and 83 words per minute as measured on the DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2006) passages and their reading was hesitant, lacking prosody and expression.

According to Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) students scoring below the 50th percentile should be making a gain of between .7 and .8 in the number of words per minute each week. The students in the Tier 2 program were meeting the Hasbrouck and Tindal goals, but their progress was not sufficient to meet the demands of the general education classroom. As presented by Allington (2005), one of the goals of intervention is to accelerate the acquisition of effective reading skills and behaviors. The data below presents the fluency rates of the five students for the first eight weeks of the incorporation of graphic novels in the intervention program. Table 3 presents the fifth grade Oral Reading Fluency Norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006) for the spring (third) period of the school year and Table 4 presents the fifth grade Benchmark Goals (DIBELS) for the end of the year.

Table 3. *5th-Grade Fluency Targets, Spring Assessment*

Percentile	Spring WCPM	Average Weekly Improvement
50	139	0.9
25	109	0.8
10	83	0.7

Note. WCPM = Words Correct Per Minute; Average weekly improvement is the average words per week growth you can expect from a student.

Table 4. *DIBELS 5th-Grade End of the Year Benchmark Goals*

Status	Scores
Low risk	124 and above
Some risk	103 - 123
At risk	0 - 102

Note. Oral Reading Fluency Score, Months 7 - 10

As shown in Table 5, students' scores increased over 25 wpm through the course of the Intervention lessons. Students' rates of fluency increased so as to move them from at or below the 10th percentile to just below or at the 25th percentile when compared to their grade level peers. While the students continue to remain at risk, most moved from the "at risk" to "some risk" categories (DIBELS). The results are startling based on students' past records of progress.

Table 5. *Students' Oral Reading Fluency Rates*

	Prior to the incorporation of Graphic Novels	Graphic Novels after Instruction	Graphic Novels before Instruction	Graphic Novels for two days; Intervention for three days	Graphic Novels for two days; Intervention for three days
	Week 0	Week 2	Week 4	Week 6	Week 8
Miranda	75	78	84	90	101
Adrien	82	85	89	97	109
Tameka	78	81	84	93	105
Jason	72	74	77	86	97
Collin	83	85	90	98	115

Changes in Student Behaviors

While the incorporation of graphic novels did not begin as a research project, rather as an opportunity to incorporate some new material into the Tier 2 intervention program, as the program progressed, the intervention teacher and classroom teachers noticed significant positive changes in students' literacy behaviors. During the first two weeks the students were reading more; they were decoding words and sharing a bit of what they had read. They spoke of the "cool" different books that they got to read.

It was not until the third week of the study, however, that the real change in reading behaviors became apparent. The first change noted was that the students were returning to their classroom retelling the selection of the graphic novel they had read. During the self-selected reading period in the general education classroom, Collin, for example, sat in the middle of a beanbag chair. He mouthed the words as he moved his eyes across the page. His normally active body remained still and his gaze intense. At the end of the period, he thrust his hand in the air in order to be the first one to share his thoughts and feelings about the graphic novel. Another exciting change was that students requested that they be able to share their graphic novels with their peers in their general education classroom. Tameka and Adrien often returned to their class reciting lines from the graphic novel previously read. One morning Miranda burst into the school office and demanded to see the school principal. When the principal exited her office, Miranda screamed, "Look at me, I'm reading a real book and I like it!" All of the students requested permission to take their books home to read and share with their families. For the first time, these students were seeing themselves as readers.

An examination of student work found that the students were incorporating the vocabulary from the graphic novels into their classroom writing. Students integrated words such as *invincible*, *vindicating*, *perplexing*, and *foreshadowing* into their writing. Some students were sketching out their essays and then adding text to the visuals and these visuals represented their ideas that were then translated into written language. The students were transferring what they had learned to new texts and settings, thus applying their skills to authentic contexts. Teachers reported that students were also completing a larger percentage of their classroom reading assignments. They were able to more rapidly decode multisyllabic words and they recognized the reason for an authors' choice of words.

In addition, we observed that students took risks that they had not taken in the past as they incorporated developmental spellings of more complex words into their work instead of choosing simple words that they could spell. Jason created a list of new words from his graphic novel reading and placed a check next to the word when he used it in his general education classroom writing. Intervention students spoke of character motives and behaviors. We observed that they were making connections from the strategies employed in reading graphic novels to the general education classroom reading materials. They articulated their new skills to their classroom teachers, the school secretary, and the lunch supervisors.

The intervention teacher observed that, at lunchtime, students brought graphic novels to the eating area and read them and formed their own lunchtime literature group that included others from the general education classroom. As the intervention teacher walked onto the playground at lunchtime, she found her intervention students engaged in conversation about the graphic novel they were reading. Their faces were animated and their bodies were moving, mimicking the characters in the story. She was greeted with a recitation of the text and an additional comment, “See, we can read and we are reading. Look at us teaching the other kids about graphic novels.”

In the general education classroom, the students formed a second set of literature study groups. They would read aloud or share their books with others in their class. While watching the students, the intervention teacher observed fingers pointing out and voices discussing the elements of the visual art. Intervention students were becoming experts on the visual arts and mentored their general education peers. Soon the terms panel, bubble, gutter, frame, thinking bubble, mood, contrast, shadow, light, darkness, and intentions were part of the literature conversations.

Conclusions and Implications

Tier 2 intervention programs are designed to provide intensive targeted instruction to students who are not successful in Tier 1 (classroom based) intervention programs. In order to meet the needs of the students and teachers in this urban elementary school, the intervention instructional periods were 30 minutes in length. This limited time required that sessions create instruction that raised the students’ level of skill, engagement, and motivation. Authentic reading experiences that incorporated motivating and engaging texts provided the motivation for students to apply their skills.

The five students included in this formative research study were 5th graders with a record of academic failure. They were not succeeding in aspects of the general education classroom instruction and over time had fallen further behind their peers. In order to close their achievement gap, acceleration of learning was necessary. The graphic novels provided opportunities for students to feel successful about the act of reading, instilling confidence that enabled them to see reading as enjoyable and furthering their desire to read for pleasure. Data indicated that students’ reading fluency as measured by the district mandated program, DIBELS (Good & Kaminski, 2006), was greater than that expected in an intervention program. In a period of two weeks, the gains, as measured by number of words read in a minute, doubled.

While DIBELS data only represents one aspect of reading achievement, fluency, these findings are positive.

Both the intervention teacher and the classroom teachers saw that intervention student behaviors were changing. The graphic novels provided opportunities for students to feel successful about the act of reading by increasing their self-efficacy, which encouraged them to see reading as enjoyable and furthered their desire to read for fun. Allington (2005) identified the needs of struggling readers as reading a great deal, accessing appropriate texts, and developing fluency to become proficient readers. The incorporation of the graphic novels into the Tier 2 intervention program provided readers with engaging appropriate texts and opportunities for self-determined reading, thus leading these students to read more and develop better fluency. Students ultimately considered reading to be more enjoyable, furthering their desire to read for pleasure and they completed the follow-up activities with success.

The intervention teacher applied strategies to increase student learning, utilizing evidenced-based instruction and data-based decision making in the instructional process to meet students' needs. Her reflections on the level of success of the instruction led to changes in the content and the reorganization of the Tier 2 instruction. She also recognized that while the Tier 2 intervention program addressed the students' needs with respect to the cognitive domain of reading, it was not addressing students' affective needs as the intervention students lacked engagement in the reading process.

Intervention Programs

Most RTI research has taken place with primary (K-2) students. This study adds to our knowledge of effective intervention practices for older struggling readers and highlights the importance of motivation and engagement in empowering struggling readers. More investigation of RTI with older readers is necessary to further identify those elements within the content of the instruction that lead to the development of reading fluency, comprehension, and enjoyment.

In the quest to build skills for reading fluency and comprehension, the content of Tier 2 RTI programs may be too clinical, ignoring the use of authentic materials and the influence of student perceptions of their self-efficacy. Therefore, as educators, we need to reexamine the content of RTI programs within the context of student learning including the interests of the students, their culture and language. We need to identify what engages and motivates students, especially those with poor

academic skills and perceptions of failure. The results of the study may call for the development of the content for Tier 2 RTI programs that incorporate targeted skill development with the use of authentic text, visual media and forms of literacy that are appealing to students. Thus the RTI process may more effectively develop both the cognitive and the affective domains of learning.



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Appendix A

Graphic Novels Monday, Tuesday

Monday: *Bone: Crown of Horns*, Chapter 2: Mim (5 pages in length)

This chapter is a short story of four or five pages taking place in Thorn's dream. The Red Dragon asks Thorn to look into a light and try to see beyond it. The Red Dragon then tells the story of the Queen of Dragons, Mim, wherein she was subject to demonic possession by the Lord of the Locust. This caused a battle that generated the valley that forms the story's setting. Readers see Mim for the first time, though this story had been mentioned in the earlier collection *Rock Jaw: Master of the Eastern Border* by its titular character, the mountain lion Roque Ja, though he had scorned to believe it historical.

Mini-Review

Strategies for reading and gaining meaning:

Scan the page

Look at the pictures

Make some predictions based on the content of the previous chapters

Share with your partner your thoughts – create a sketch – 1 minute sketch

Learning new words – vocabulary

Teacher identifies new words in the text. The students complete the chart below after reading.

New Word	Clues from the Dialogue	Clues from the Illustrations	Clues from the Text	Inferred Meaning
Ensued				
Dictionary confirmation				
Recede				
Dictionary confirmation				
Valiant				
Dictionary confirmation				

Classroom discussion/comprehension:

Authors use of contrasts: light and dark, bright and dull, balance and not balanced

Text bubbles in white and in yellow; author’s change in the color of the text bubbles

Authors use of story within a story; why did the author tell us this story?

Characters

Inferring characters feelings, noting character traits

Describe the characters to your partner

Fluency

Oral reading with expression; note how the illustrations set the tone for the tone and prosody of the oral reading

Author’s use of punctuation – ellipses...(slow down in transition to next frame)

Author’s use of different shapes of text bubbles – wiggly – use a scary voice

New word identification practices

None for this chapter

Students select words to the class word wall, use pictures/words in description

Bone: Crown of Horns, Chapter 3: Gaps (read first eight pages of chapter)

Gran’ma Ben, Thorn, and the Bones clamber up a tower, where Thorn may see where all the perilous “ghost circles” are that are surrounding the city. Thorn

perceives Rock Jaw in the hills, and then has sudden visions of the valley exploding, and of the Lord of the Locusts. These visions shock her. While the others tend to Thorn, Phoney and Smiley attempt to open the well where the treasure is hidden, thinking to take the treasure. Thorn's visions tell her that the Lord of the Locusts no longer needs her or Briar, because he is possessing his original host, Mim. Phoney and Smiley return to the city's gate with their hay cart (having Smiley's Rat Creature Bartleby and the treasure hidden in the hay), when the farmer who had formerly lost the cart sees it and knocks it over. Bartleby is exposed, whereupon people try to kill him. Bartleby, Phoney, and Smiley narrowly escape. They climb the ladder as Fone and Thorn are coming down, which results in a struggle. As they fight, Thorn disappears. Fone goes after her.

From <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Special:RecentChanges&feed=atom>

Language

Phrase 'sitting ducks' – How does the phrase describe the characters' situation?

"Your Highness! I've just had a troubling thought. Your sister **COULD** be trying to use the ghost circles to create FEAR. Fear weakens the SPIRIT, which is our only counterbalance against the great emptiness of the house of mist. If the balance ever tipped too FAR..." (the dialog from one of the dream masters).

Discussion prompt...

Compare the visual elements of the first four pages in the chapter with the visuals of the prior chapter. What do you see?

As we read students create the links between the facial expressions and the character's voice and tone (Gran'ma Ben's open mouth, Briar's eyes, facial expression and body language of the dream masters). This may be completed in graphic or linguistic forms.

Creating text

Create text for one of the wordless panels on pages 59, 60, 64, or 65

Create a panel to follow the panel on page 65

Fluency – using author's cues to improve fluency

Authors use of multiple types of text bubbles and punctuation

Bold print, artistic letters

Punctuation including ..., ? and !

Smooth and jagged speech bubbles

Decoding and word identification

Select a word

Generate as many words as you can based on the word chosen, for example: explain—students can generate explanation, explaining, explained, explanatory

Appendix B

Direct Instruction and Practice

Lesson Outline for Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday

	Decoding	Fluency	Sight Words	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Wed.	REWARDS (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2006) - Sections A-E Word Warm Ups (individual)	Great Leaps Phrases Six Minute Solution (Adams, G. & Brown, S. 2003). readings Read Naturally (Ihnot, C. & Ihnot, T., 1991).	1000 Instant Words: The Most Common Words for Reading and Spelling (Fry, 2000) words (untimed) read in groups of 25	Vocabulary found in Read Naturally (Ihnot, C. & Ihnot, T., 1991). selection	Students respond to questions that accompany the specific Read Naturally (Ihnot, C. & Ihnot, T., 1991). selection
Thurs.	REWARDS Sections F-H Word Warm Ups (individual)	Great Leaps Phrases (Campbell, nd) Six Minute Solution Read Naturally	1000 Instant Words: The Most Common Words for Reading and Spelling (untimed) in groups of 25	Vocabulary from REWARDS section Vocabulary from Read Naturally selection	Students respond to questions that accompany the REWARDS selection
Fri.	REWARDS I-J (Passage reading for accuracy)	REWARDS J (third time)	1000 Instant Words: The Most Common Words for Reading and Spelling sight words (untimed) read in groups of 25 (timed)	Creating new words; roots and affixes from REWARDS Students add new words to meaning word wall	REWARDS J (comprehension questions that relate to reading selection) Great Leaps Stories (not read for time); students retell

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