

Hypothesis

Teaching the strategy of visualizing will alter and support students' comprehension levels when reading a text.

ABSTRACT

Teaching the strategy of visualizing to students is an essential part of comprehension when they read. It improves their oral dialogue, to be able to engage with text, and to remember or retain the meaning of what they have read, rather than simply decode the words on the page.

Research has found that teaching students the strategy of visualizing will help to improve their comprehension. The hypothesis for this study aims to prove these claims. The students involved in this study were boys and girls in Grade 2 who were good at decoding text, but had difficulty with comprehending text. These students were withdrawn from the classroom to form an 'intervention group'. The students were then guided with 10 sessions that focused on visualizing, using the Rider strategy, as independently, and as quickly as possible.

The study found that teaching the Rider Strategy of visualizing does improve the students' levels of comprehension. The data suggest that visualizing and oral dialogue is also shown to increase a fuller understanding and appreciation of what is read. This in turn does increase the level of comprehension of the students. This is how we understand and remember what we read.

INTRODUCTION

For many children the focus of reading a text becomes a focus of reading exactly what is on the page. There is little point in just being able to de-code the words on the page without being able to understand what the words, sentences, paragraphs and chapters mean. There would be no pleasure or purpose in reading and boredom and frustration would be inevitable. Furthermore, if we do not understand what we read, remembering what we read becomes so much more difficult.

A primary cause of language comprehension problems is difficulty creating an imagined gestalt – a whole picture. According to Bell (2005). This weakness causes students to only get “parts” such as a few facts or details rather than the whole picture. This weak concept imagery can cause weakness in reading comprehension. For example, Students have to reread material several times and then remember only a few details. Students may seem shy and have difficulty organizing their language. Students connect to only part of a conversation and are labeled “poor listener” Their writing is described as unorganized and nonspecific. Visualizing during reading comprehension can be taught.

Visualizing strengthens reading comprehension skills as students gain a more thorough understanding of the text they are reading. The data suggest that text comprehension is enhanced when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their own knowledge and experience, and construct mental representations in memory. (National Reading Panel, 2000 p 14) Students who visualize as they read not only have a richer reading experience, but can recall what they have read for longer periods of time. In today’s schools, too many children struggle with learning to read. As many teachers and parents will attest, reading failure has exacted a tremendous long term consequence for children’s developing self-confidence and motivation to learn, as well as for their later school performance.

As proficient readers, most of us recognize both the necessity and joy of visualizing as we read. In fact, it probably comes so naturally to us that we often don’t realize that it is

happening. But this is part of the problem. Within our daily lives we are provided with endless visual images from many sources. From daily television shows and commercials, to the billboards seen on the way to school, to the illustrations provided in textbooks; Imagery surrounds us. Yet, the images we are shown are not always the images we personally would arrive at, had they not been presented to us. Perhaps it would be more personal and reflective, as we made connections with what we read, and what we personally know about the topic.

The problem can be solved when readers visualize. Harvey and Goudvis. 2000, p97 note that “ When we visualize, we create our own movies in our minds. We become attached to the characters we visualize. Visualizing personalizes reading, keeps us engaged, and often prevents us from abandoning a book prematurely”. Reutzal & Cooter, 2004 p184. note, that visualization during reading can be likened to making mental ‘movies’ in one’s head. Students are bombarded with the visual images on TV and video games. As a result, they often view reading as a passive activity... visualization –can help transform students from passive to active readers while improving their reading comprehension (Hopkins 2004) In order to help students visualize text, we can call upon the experiences students have with T.V. movies and video games. Using these examples to guide students can help them understand the kinds of picture their minds should be forming as they read.

Calling on a student’s prior knowledge is effective in helping them to understand new ideas. Activating prior knowledge is like preparing the soil before sowing the seeds of knowledge. (Cummins, 2006) Related research by Munro, J. (2007) has found that to comprehend a text, we have to find what the reader knows about the text. Further more, the reader needs to be able to retrieve the more abstract knowledge rather than their personal experiential knowledge. It is critical that teachers not only activate their student’s prior knowledge of topics they are reading about, but also be aware of situations in which students have little or no background knowledge, so that they can build essential understandings before students begin reading. (Strickland, D. 2002)

The research between visualization and comprehension of text is strong. According to Reutzel and Cooter (2004) “ Visualization is the ability to build mental pictures of images while reading.” It is evident that our own visualizations, when reading the script, would greatly depend upon our prior knowledge and engagement with the topic. (Manning, 2002; Keene and Zimmermann, 1997).

(Harvey and Goudvis 2000). Creating an opportunity to challenge our students to call on their collective experiences (prior knowledge) is essential. Through this process we move students from memorizing information to meaningful learning and begin the journey of connecting learning events. (Christen and Murphy 1991).

A great deal of research supports the merits of the think aloud process. Tovani, 2000, p26 states that “ Mental modeling is an even better way to help students understand how good readers comprehend text. When teachers make invisible mental processes visible, they arm young readers with powerful weapons” (2000, p. 27). Quick activities used with any text that they are reading, can support students as they learn to visualize. Allowing opportunities for students to share their images with the teacher and other students is vital. Offering them help in describing these images is also an important part of the development of the strategy. Struggling readers benefit greatly from the illustrations provided in the text. They offer support to these readers more than non-struggling readers because poor readers tend to need confirmation about what they are reading (Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson, 2003). The evidence that visualizing works is in the evidence that the students can make connections between the different things they read. This means that students relate what they read to personal experiences (text-to-self), to information from other text (text-to-text), and to information about the world (text-to-world) in order to enhance understanding of self, text, and life. As Pinnell (2006) notes, students become active rather passive learners.

This study aims to investigate the use of the visualizing strategy to support low achieving Grade 2 students to improve their levels of reading comprehension.

The hypothesis behind this action research is that teaching the strategy of visualizing will alter and support students' comprehension levels when reading a text.

The hypothesis that drives this action research relates to the link between the use of the Rider strategy to target the students' comprehension understanding and achievement levels.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study uses an OXO design in the context of a real classroom intervention program, in which the gain in comprehension during visualizing, following specific modeling of sentences and paragraphs using the Rider Strategy, is monitored for Grade 2 students who demonstrate a higher level of decoding skills than comprehending skills.

Participants.

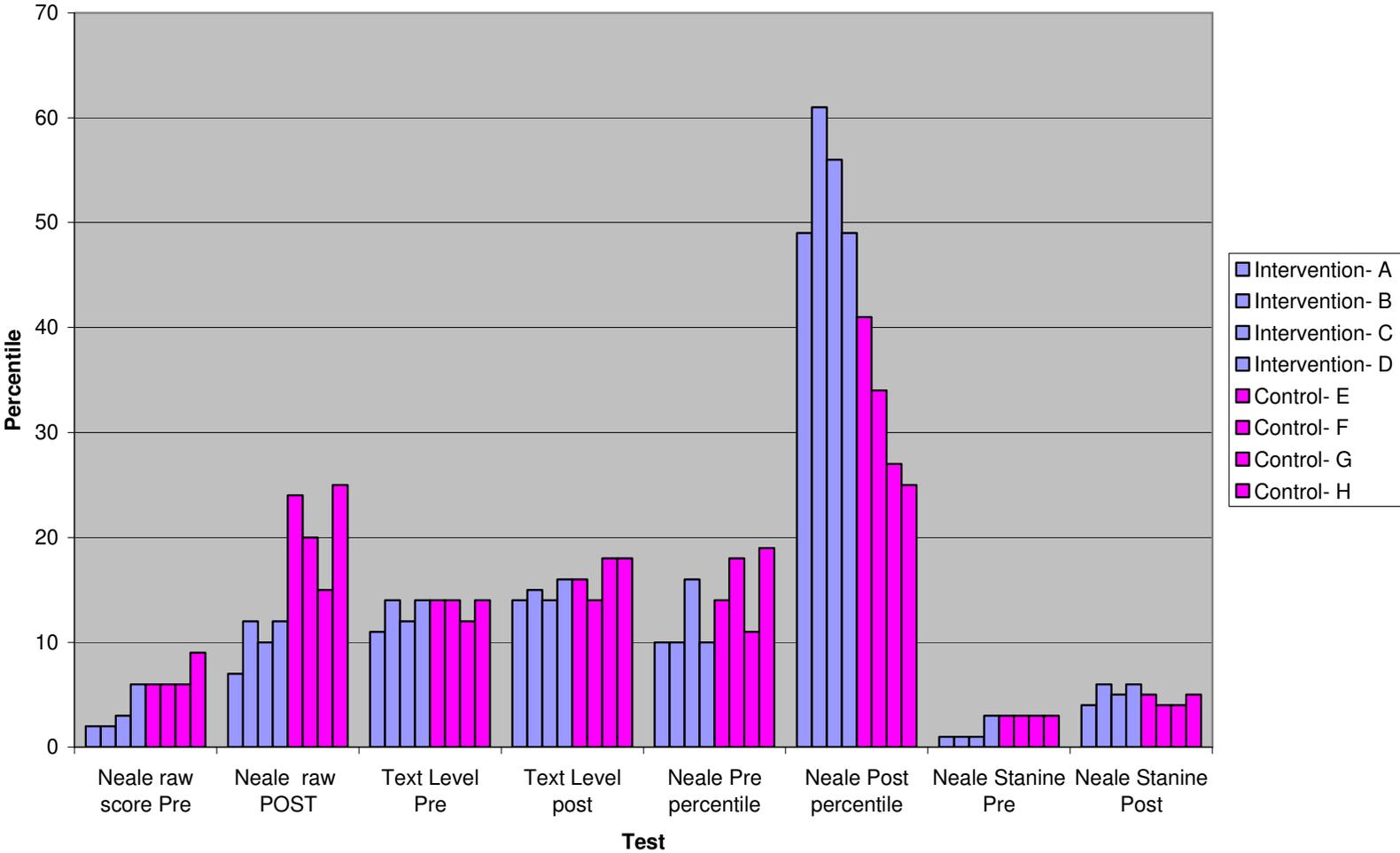
The participants are 8 Grade 2 students who currently have a history of reading difficulties in comprehension. The students attend a Catholic primary school in an outer-western suburb of Melbourne. The students have had two years of schooling prior to their participation in this study. Student information including Age, Gender, Entry Reading Ability, Test Scores and other relevant reading criteria can be read in Table 1.

Table1.

Name	0 or 1 Teaching/Control Group	Age in MONTHS	Gender 0=Female 1=Male	Years of Schooling	ESL No=0 Yes=1	LNSLN funding 0=SLD 1=ID 2=Asp	Earlier Intevention No=0 RR=1 Bridges=2 ERIK=3...	Ob Survey / Letter ID	EMA No=0 Yes=1
A	T	96	1	3	0		0	51	1
B	T	87	0	3	0		0	54	0
C	T	95	1	3	0		1	53	0
D	T	92	0	3	0		0	53	0
E	C	93	1	3	0		0	51	0
F	C	93	0	3	0		0	53	0
G	C	90	0	3	0		0	54	0
H	C	87	1	3	0		0	54	0

Attendance No. of sessions	Spontaneous Retell Pre	Spontaneous Retell Post	Neale raw score Pre	Neale raw POST	Text Level Pre	Text Level post	Neale Pre percentile	Neale Post percentile	Neale Stanine Pre	Neale Stanine Post
10	2	8	2	7	11	14	10	49	1	4
10	2	11	2	12	14	15	10	61	1	6
10	4	11	3	10	12	14	16	56	1	5
10	2	11	6	12	14	16	10	49	3	6
10	2	11	6	24	14	16	14	41	3	5
10	2	10	6	20	14	14	18	34	3	4
10	2	11	6	15	12	18	11	27	3	4
10	2	8	9	25	14	18	19	25	3	5

Pre and post scores of Neale analysis- intervention and control groups



The above 8 students have been chosen because they are below the standard benchmark for Grade 2 and scored as below average against the Neale analysis for comprehension. Further insights gained from running record analyses, suggest that these same students are able to decode, but have some difficulty in comprehending or remembering the text that they just read. Hence, they were to be withdrawn for extra assistance. Literacy data scores collected at the start of the year also indicated that these students would benefit from assistance.

These eight students were chosen after discussion with the school's Literacy co-coordinator and the current classroom teacher. Early indications are that these students are able to decode text at a standard level however they experience difficulties using information gained through reading. They also find it difficult to remember details and confuse these details. It is expected that these students would benefit from extra assistance in learning to visualize, which will impact on their full understanding and appreciation of what they have read in all areas of the curriculum.

MATERIALS.

The materials used include the following

- Neale Analysis of Reading (Neale 1998) This was used to determine the level at which the students were comprehending text.
- Comprehension Task Spontaneous and Cued retelling Students read sentences and have to visualize what they read and link ideas .Number of ideas are scored.
- Sheets of blank paper, pencils to sketch and tape recorder .
- Self efficacy +ve and -ve record sheet.
- Rider Strategy Cue cards.

The data that were collected in the assessment period can be read in Table 1.

METHOD

The eight students chosen for this study were withdrawn from the Grade 2 classroom and tested individually in a quiet setting for all the tests. The Neale Analysis of reading ability was used as a Pre-test to gain a standardized level of comprehension. A further test of both spontaneous and cued retelling was administered individually to students to gain insights into their ability to remember the ideas in a story. The data collected indicate a low level of comprehension for this age group. These data were used as a baseline to measure improvement at the end of the ten teaching sessions and they informed the planning of the intervention. The intervention took place over a three week period. The pre-testing commenced 28th April and the post-testing commenced 14th May.

The eight students were then split into two groups, a control group and a teaching group. The ‘teaching group’ or ‘intervention group’ was students A,B,C,D, while the control group were students E,F,G,H. The students were matched according to the data collected from the Pre-testing, in regards to the students’ abilities, gender, age and reading background.

The four students in the intervention were withdrawn for a series of ten lessons of approximately forty minutes duration over the three weeks. These sessions were conducted after recess in an intervention room out of the classroom. The participants in the ‘control group’ remained in the classroom with their teacher and they participated in the normal classroom reading activities. Extra assistance was not given to the ‘control’ students to minimize confounding variables. The ten teaching sessions were based on Munro’s (2006) Visualizing strategy. The students in the ‘intervention group’ were taught how to visualize part of a story. The teacher modeled the Rider strategy, by describing a picture or video that she made in her mind. Then the teacher described the picture in her own words, with as much detail as possible and shared her response with the group.

The commencement of the program was spent introducing the strategy of visualizing to the students orally. The process was modeled by the teacher and was followed up with

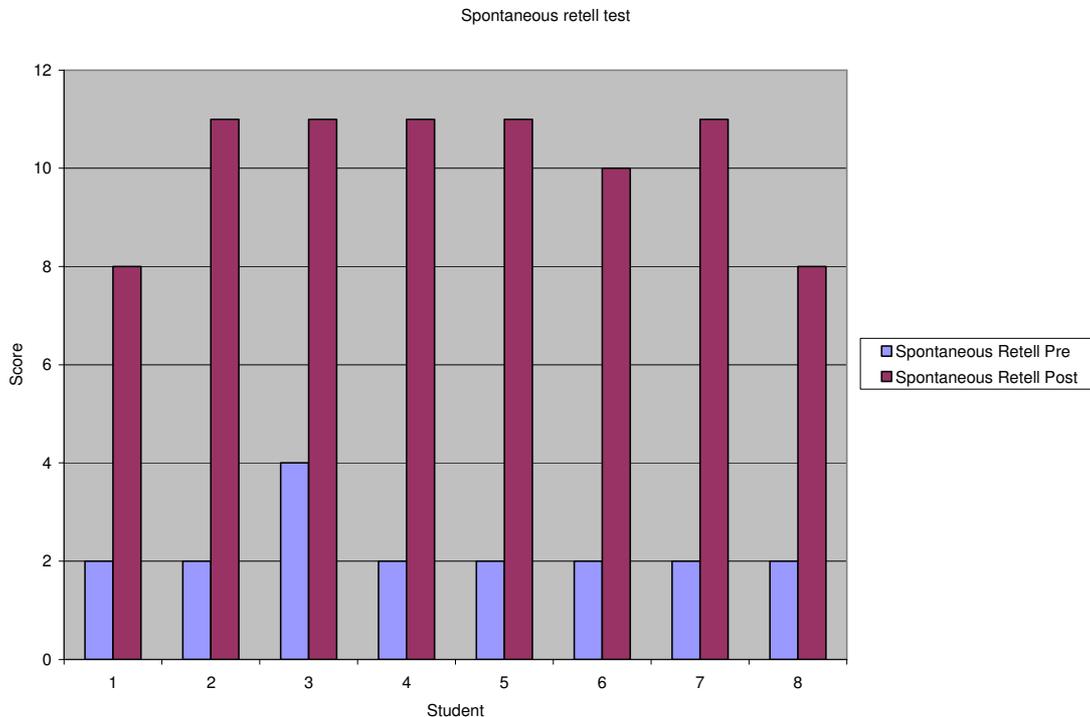
the student saying what they were going to do, and saying what they will visualize and then do it.. Each session was modeled for the students. This enabled the teacher to discuss the visual interpretations that the students had made. Some pictures were big, some small. Some students made photographs or still pictures in their heads to allow them to become absorbed in the story. It allowed students to work individually, to work in pairs and in a whole group context. The students were able to internalize the strategy and use it independently and spontaneously. The teacher was able to record observations and anecdotal notes on individual students to help cater for individual needs as well as to inform the classroom teacher when planning lessons.

RESULTS

The influence of teaching the Visualizing Strategy to improve comprehension was compared and measured using the following pre and post tests. In the following Table 2, Students A, B, C & D represent the intervention group, while students E, F, G, & H represent the control group.

All students were given an initial pre-test of reading a few sentences as determined by the Fry's Readability Procedure. The students were asked to recall as much information as they could about the key events and the plot within the narrative text. A Spontaneous recall and also a cued recall were implemented. Students were then given the same narrative text as a post-test. Students in the 'intervention group' were able to recall an average 75% during post-testing of a narrative text. This was 30% more than the 'control group' students who were able to recall on average 40% of the plot during post testing. The 'intervention students' demonstrated an increase in recollection of events in the text since the teaching of the visualizing strategy. These students were able to recall and verbalize many different ideas on the theme of the text and what the outcomes could be.

Table 2



The results of the visualizing pretest prompted the use of the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability, to ascertain difficulties in comprehension ability. Raw scores, percentile ranks and stanines have been included for comparison. The data, contained in the Table 1, note an overall improvement in comprehension raw scores, percentile ranks and stanines for the ‘intervention group’.

Whilst the students in the ‘control group’ (students E, F, G, and H,) made no real gains in comprehension, the students in the ‘intervention group’ made significant gains. See Table 2. The group as a whole had improved in overall confidence. They displayed an ability to remember the events of a story after using the visualizing strategy. The group presented as a very shy and quiet group of students. However, after the ten sessions the oral discussions that took place within the group were very pleasing and surprising. All of the students could articulate their visualizations clearly and were keen to share their pictures. They also found it easy to put the story into their own words. Due to the fact that the text

was reviewed and remodeled each session, the children were keen to try and retell it on their own.

Student A made good gains in comprehension. At times he needed specific assistance with vocabulary as some of his word meanings were not consistent with the story.

Student B and D were able to articulate clearly their own interpretations of the text and some of these were very different and insightful, whilst still making complete sense in the context of the story. Student C made good gains in comprehension.

The results support the hypothesis that the visualizing strategy does assist the student's ability to comprehend. The strategy allowed the students to be able to automatize and use the strategy spontaneously and as quickly as possible.

DISCUSSION

As the data results demonstrate in Table 2, the post-testing scores for the 'intervention group' were improved overall, while the scores for the 'control group' show little improvement through the study. Results and trends for each of the students in the intervention group demonstrate evidence that prove the hypothesis that drove this research study. It is apparent that teaching students the Visualizing Strategy does improve a student's comprehension and does have an impact on their oral language ability.

These results support claims in the relevant literature regarding the teaching of visualizing to improve comprehension. The teaching of the Visualizing Strategy has impacted upon the comprehension levels of the students involved in the 'intervention group'. These findings contribute to those researched by others in the area of reading comprehension attainment. (Hopkins 2004, Harvey and Goudvis 2000, Tovani 2000, Pinnell 2006, and The National Reading Panel 2000). By participating in the ten lessons, the students were not only able to engage and comprehend the texts (Hibbing, Rankin & Erikson, 2003), but it allowed them to share their images with the teacher and the other

students. This had a greater effect on the understanding of the material and enhanced comprehension as noted by (Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993)

Teaching the RIDER strategy as part of the Visualizing strategy, gave the students a framework to share and reflect orally at the conclusion of each lesson. It also allowed the teacher to be able to support the student's continued use of the strategy. This in turn seemed to give the students greater confidence to be able to use their own words to describe what they could see in the text. Visualizing and verbalizing enabled the students to read material and comprehend it more than just recall. It enabled the students to receive, organize and express language. The students responded to oral directions, humor, cause and effect, and improved in their attention to oral language. The students were able to receive, organize and express language confidently. Verbalizing aided their writing skills in that it enabled them to create images. Finally the process allowed for critical thinking enabling interpretive questions to be asked regarding, ideas, inferences, conclusions, predictions and evaluation.

A self-efficacy test for speaking and listening was given to the students during the pre and post testing periods. It was noted that the general response from the 'intervention group' were far more positive than those responses from the students in the 'control group'. The data from the students in the 'intervention group' was overall a more confident and calm response, whilst also noting that they now feel that they can be successful. The students in the 'control group' gave positive answers during the test, however did not seem to be so sure that they could be successful.

The increase in the comprehension scores can be attributed to the explicit teaching of the Rider Strategy. The effectiveness of this strategy is evident in the results of the post-tests for those students in the 'intervention group'. The students in the 'control group' also displayed a surprising result in their post testing scores for the Neale Analysis, except for student G, who still had a Very low score for comprehension.

However, after discussion with the students' classroom teacher, it was noted that the student had suffered an asthma attack in the teaching period and spent time in hospital. This may have had some influence on the student's score in the Post-test results.

Implications for teaching Practice:

The findings of this research into comprehension have shown that there are many benefits for learners who have been demonstrated how to visualize, whilst using the accompanying Rider strategy. It is important to note that the students were able to make significant gains over a relatively short time, namely a three week period. This has benefits not only for the learners, but for the teacher involved in the classroom.

The findings showed the importance of initial testing to confirm not only the level the student is at, but how competent and confident the student feels with the task. The importance of teaching students how to use the Rider strategy, orally and then modeling the task for them, was a vital component of the lessons. The assessment practices were an integral part of the teaching and learning and confirmed the need to keep doing assessment to inform our teaching and catch those students who may slip through the cracks.

Possible Directions for future research.

A number of possible directions for future research are as follows:

- To investigate the effectiveness of the students ability to use oral language to support their learning.
- To investigate the reasons why students may still slip through the cracks in regard to comprehension and visualizing even after having been taught the strategies i.e. Investigating Auditory Processing delay.
www.listeningworks.com.au/aboutap.htm

- To investigate the need to keep doing assessment as, to inform our teaching.
- It would be of interest to develop the Visualizing strategy with staff and investigate if their learning of the strategy may improve their teaching and understanding of the strategy.
- To investigate how transferable the strategy is to be used within other areas of the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this action research project suggest that teaching Visualizing, namely the Rider Strategy, can have an impact on a student's comprehension level. The strategies were explicitly modeled orally for the students and allowed them to say the picture in their mind and then say what they did. This in turn seemed to lead to a fuller understanding and appreciation of what was read and to a deeper, more memorable learning experience, with their peers. They seemed to have more control over what they had learnt and the gains were sustained after only ten teaching sessions.

The students were able to have the picture of what they were reading in their heads in much the same way as watching a movie or video. This gave them a picture in their heads and they were able to become absorbed in the story and not become bored or distracted.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Sequence of Teaching lessons

Appendix 2- Comprehension

- Spontaneous and Cued Retelling

Appendix 1

The aim of the teaching sessions was teach visualizing while reading, to assist the student's comprehension and improve their oral expression.

The first two sessions were spent demonstrating the RIDER strategy during reading. The teacher read the sentence and then modeled how to visualize the text in her mind and then to describe the picture in her mind. The strategy was introduced according to the outline provided by John Munro 2006 Course notes.

Teacher Introduces the strategy: I am going to teach you something that you can do that will help you to remember what you read. It is called visualizing. This is what you do After you have read each sentence, you make a picture of it in your mind and say what the picture is. We will begin doing this with sentences, then pairs of sentences and then with paragraphs. After the sentence is read the teacher visualizes the sentence then the student visualizes the same sentence

Session	Student Activity	Sentence Read
1	Introduce first example sentence. Teacher reviews each action. .Let's look at what we did here. We read each sentence and then made a picture of it. See how it helped you to understand what the text said. Reflection.	The text is about some big cats, like lions and tigers that live around the world.
	Introduce 2 nd example The teacher models the visualizing first and the students then take turns. Teacher reminds them regularly of what they are	When you hear the word 'cat' you probably think of the pets you have at

	<p>doing. What do you tell yourself to do when you visualize. Do you have any questions?</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>home. The warm cuddly kittens, that play with balls and enjoy being patted.</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher reads aloud a paragraph Students read aloud the same paragraph sentence by sentence. • Teacher/students visualize sentence by sentence in whole group • In small groups visualize each paragraph, sentence by sentence & describe their image. <p>Students write down what they do when they visualize. Read a sentence, make a picture and say the picture you have made</p> <p>Reflection.</p>	<p>The young man and his friend rode on their bike. They were enjoying themselves.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher/student read aloud each paragraph (modeling) • Teacher/student visualize and describe pairs of sentences in a whole group • In small groups visualize each sentence and describe their image/ <p>Students again recall the steps to follow when they visualize.</p> <p>Reflection</p>	<p>The birds were singing in the trees.</p> <p>The two friends chatted.</p>
4	<p>Students read aloud each paragraph (modeling)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students visualize and describe pairs of sentences in whole group • In small groups visualize and describe 	<p>They were not paying attention to anything.</p> <p>They were supposed to watch where they were going.</p>

	<p>their image.</p> <p>Once the text has been visualized as a group interactive activity, students in small groups can have a go at writing their mental picture of each sentence.</p> <p>Reflection</p>	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read aloud each paragraph • Students visualize and describe pairs of sentences in whole group. • In small groups visualize pairs of sentences and describe their image. <p>Revise steps one needs to follow when one visualizes.</p>	<p>The track became narrow and twisted.</p> <p>Suddenly it began to slope down and the bike sped up.</p>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read aloud each paragraph • Teacher/students visualize and describe each paragraph in whole group activity. • In small groups visualize paragraph and describe image. <p>Here the teacher can correct the student's written responses. After students have visualized several of the paragraphs discuss what steps they used to visualize .Students say the processes they used to arrive at their mental picture.</p>	<p>People in the park watched and gasped as it went faster and faster.</p> <p>The two riders weren't smiling and chatting any longer.</p>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read aloud each paragraph • Students visualize sentence by sentence in whole group activity. • Each student individually visualizes sentence by sentence and describes their image 	<p>Now they were gripping the bike as tightly as they could, showing fear on their faces</p> <p>People in the park had stopped what they were</p>

	Describe their image and say the process they used to arrive at their image Reflection	doing and started to yell “Stop” or “Be careful”
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students read silently each paragraph • Students visualize each paragraph and describe their images in whole group activity. • In small groups visualizes each paragraph and describes their image. Reflection.	All of a sudden the path goes around a sharp curve. Ahead they see in the middle of the path a huge stone. The closer they get to it, the more enormous it becomes
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read silently each paragraph. • Students visualize each paragraph and describe their images in whole group activity • Each student individually visualizes each paragraph (and describes image to partner). Reflection	As they fly towards it, their hearts are beating louder and louder and they try to take avoidance action.
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read silently each paragraph • Each student visualizes each paragraph • Each student individually writes their “visualize” of each paragraph. Reflection	There is a loud thud, the front wheel crumples and the young couple is airborne, flying over the obstacle to the grass on the side of the path.

Appendix 2.

Comprehension – Spontaneous and Cued Retelling.

Title of Selected Passage The Lost Ring.

Mum looked sad when she met Jack from school. “I have lost my ring, she said. “I have looked everywhere, but I can’t find it.”

“Is that the ring Dad gave you?” Jack asked.

“Yes,” said Mum. “He’ll be worried about it.”

“I will help you look for it after tea,” said Jack.

Jack had pasta for tea. His Mum had made some little chocolates cakes for Jack. When he was eating his third cake, his teeth bit on something hard. He took it out of his mouth.

Guess what it was. It was his mum’s ring! What a surprise they both had!

Characteristic of retelling	Ideas in the story	No of ideas/points	Student’s score, Spontaneous retell	Student’s score, for cued retell
Main characters	The main characters are Jack and Mum	2		
Theme of the Story	Mum lost her ring	1		
Plot of the story	Jack is going to help Mum find her ring after dinner	2		
Events of the story	Jack came home from school.	1		
	Mum looked sad.	1		

	<p>She had lost her ring.</p> <p>Jack remembered it was the ring Dad had given her.</p> <p>Jack had pasta and cupcakes for tea</p> <p>He bit on something hard in the third cupcake.</p>	<p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>		
<p>Inferential ideas (infer, predict, explain, read between the lines)</p>	<p>Dad would be worried about the ring.</p> <p>It could have slipped off Mum's finger because it didn't fit.</p> <p>Mum could have worn gloves.</p> <p>Boy finds ring in Cupcake</p> <p>The Mystery of the Ring.</p>	<p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p> <p>1</p>		
		<p>Score /16</p>		

