

Teaching Grade Two students who are accurate text decoders but have difficulties in comprehension, to use 'repeated reading to increase their fluency and comprehension.

Abstract

Many students in the junior school have learnt to be good text decoders, they can read a text at an age appropriate level with high percentage of accuracy in word recognition but they experience difficulties in comprehension. These children use all their energy in decoding as they read and when they are asked to retell or answer questions they are unable to demonstrate understanding of the text.

The hypothesis of this study is that teaching Grade Two students who are accurate text decoders but have difficulties in comprehension, to use 'repeated reading to increase their fluency and comprehension. Research on the development of fluency and comprehension skills suggest that using repeated reading as a strategy can help students recall facts because they have read a text at least three times. Combine 'repeated reading' with Readers Theatre and this is then a motivational tool to get students to reread the same text a number of times. In this study students were given the opportunity to reread three plays a number of times and perform these plays to their peers.

The study compared the results of two groups of students: a control group who were not withdrawn for the repeated reading sessions and an intervention group, who were withdrawn from the classroom for an opportunity to practice the repeated reading strategy. Results indicate support for the hypothesis as the comprehension scores indicated some improvement in at least one of the tests for all eight students.

However, results also indicated that the fluency for all eight students decreased according to one test.

The results suggest that 'repeated reading' used as a strategy to improve comprehension was successful and reluctant readers enjoyed the strategy as it was embedded in Readers Theatre. The students should be given the opportunity to use this strategy as it is workable in a classroom setting as well as an intervention strategy.

Introduction

Many of our students in the junior school are excellent decoders but their comprehension rate has not kept up with their decoding reading age. Some children who have been through the Reading Recovery program are reading at the expected bench mark or just above, for their grade level, but their fluency is slow due to their decoding speed and therefore their comprehension is not at their reading age. The difficulty they have is reading at an expected fluency rate and using prosody features that will allow them to comprehend what the text is about and to answer questions that demonstrate an understanding of the text. This reading difficulty can affect all areas of the curriculum and the student's self-efficacy as they find the need to read and respond in all aspects of their learning and begin to see the gap as it widens between themselves and their peers.

A number of studies have examined how “fluency serves as a bridge between decoding words and comprehension” (Carnine, Silbert, Kame'enui, & Tarver, 2004, cited in Therrien and Kubina, 2006, p.156) “La Berge and Samuels, 1974, cited in Therrien, 2004, p.252) theorized that reading fluency problems stem from readers' poor decoding skills. When decoding is too slow, a “bottleneck” is created that impedes the flow of thought and hampers comprehension. Poor readers often spend a great deal of their cognitive resources on decoding and have little left for comprehension.” Repeated Reading is one strategy that has been shown to enhance fluency and comprehension in a number of studies. (Samuels, 1979 cited in Homan, Klesius & Hite, 1993, p 94) developed the repeated reading procedure “as a means for developing automatic decoding with unskilled readers.” The repeated reading procedure include the following steps “(a) The students read a short passage aloud while time and reading miscues are recorded by the teacher; (b) the student practice rereading silently or orally several times; (c) the students reread the passage aloud again as the teacher records time and miscues;

and (d) the teacher or students prepare a graph depicting the growth in performance between the first and the last reading.”(Samuels,1979,cited Homan, Klesius & Hite, 1993, p 94)

Research seems to agree that the repeated reading strategy improves the fluency of readers and some agree it improves comprehension. “First, rereading the same passage has been shown to significantly increase reading rate and accuracy (Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Chomsky, 1976; Dahl, 1974; Dowhower, 1987; Rashotte & Torgesen, 1985; Samuels, 1979/1997) and the ability to segment text into meaningful chunks (Dowhower, 1987). Second, many scholars (Chards, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1998; Sindelar, Monda, & O’Shea, 1990; Weinstein & Cooke, 1992) report that rereading a passage significantly increases comprehension. Third, the benefits appear to carry over to unpractised texts. Dowhower’s review of relevant research indicated that having the students practice one passage to a predetermined set rate of speed leads to increases in both fluency and comprehension in fresh passages.” (Dowhower, 1997; Dowhower, 1989, cited in Tyler and Chard, 2000, p165)

Not all research has shown the link between fluency and comprehension and that while many researchers agree that repeated reading increases fluency they do not all agree that it improves comprehension significantly. Martens (1997, p602) states that “despite the popularity of repeated readings, some concerns have been expressed. One concern relates to the success of repeated reading in increasing readers’ comprehension.” While numerous studies (e.g. Dowhower, 1987, 1994;O’Shea et al.,1985; Rasinski, 1990a; Schreider, 1980; Weinstein & Cooke 1992) report success in “developing fluency with repeated reading, the relationship between fluency training and increased comprehension is basically still weak (Reutzel & Hollingworth , 1993; Stoddard, Valcante, Sindelar, O’Shea, & Algozzine, 1993) . Some researchers also feel that repetition of the same passage is boring, limits the

range of literature students read (thus restricting their exposure to broader vocabulary, content and genre), stifles the students' love of reading (Homan, Klesius & Hite, 1993).

Therrien, Wickstrom, and Jones (2006,p90) have conducted a research that combines repeated reading and questioning, so as to increase the fluency rate and the comprehension of their students. "The ultimate goal of question generation is for the reader to strategically monitor their comprehension by self generating and answering questions. Question generation research with beginning readers, however, indicates that instead of requiring them to generate their own questions, they should be provided with generic questions that ensure the child's attention is directed to important narrative elements (Rosenshine et al., 1996). Although students do not generate the original questions, the generic wording ensures that questions can be adapted by the child to the particular story. The inclusion of the questions after the readings is similar to Munro's cued retelling (2008) and the present study will include a combined approach of these two strategies.

The present study aims to improve the fluency and comprehension of a small group of Grade Two students, who have completed the Reading Recovery program, are good decoders and have reached the required State benchmark, but are still under their reading age in comprehension. The students do not show consistently, the use of strategies that will aid them in understanding the text at both a literal and inferential level. When meaning is lost the students continue to decode but not reread to maintain meaning or to use the surrounding words as an aid to decode a meaningful word within the context of the text. This study will introduce the students to the repeated reading strategy including cued retelling from Munro (2007) using Readers Theatre. This combined strategy will assist the students in their fluency thus bridging the gap between decoding and comprehension. The hypothesis is that teaching

Year 2 students who are good decoders but have difficulties in comprehension to use repeated reading and cued retelling to increase their fluency and comprehension.

Method

Design

The study uses a case study OXO design. Gains in fluency and comprehension, following explicit teaching of the use of repeated reading and cued retelling, are monitored for Grade 2 students. The study compares two groups of students, a control group and an intervention group.

Participants

All students chosen to participate in the study are currently at a Catholic primary school in Melbourne in one of the two Grade 2 classes with ages ranging from 7-8 years. All the children were on the Reading Recovery program during 2007 while in Grade 1 and all exited the program at or above the required State benchmark. Students were chosen based on their Reading Text Level from the February CLaSS testing using the Alphalink assessment pack. These eight children were the lowest of their cohorts with the reading level range from Level 13-20. The student's classroom teachers identified these children as needing assistance as it was noted that as the text, both in literacy and in other curriculum areas, got harder the students relied on using only decoding strategies and any comprehension strategies were non-existent. Also the Grade 2 teachers now want their students to be more independent and to read and answer questions independently and to be able to use the information read in a variety of ways. These students are struggling with the removal of some of the scaffolding that they have come to rely on, and are finding working independently a great challenge.

Materials

One of the pre-test used for this study to assess the students was PROBE (Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension). PROBE reading assessment (Parkin, Parkin & Pool, 2002), includes assessment of reading accuracy and comprehension skills. As was noted by the writers a student can read the passages accurately but this does not necessarily equate to their understanding of the text. The students were given assessment passages six month below their age due to the difficulty that they incurred when trying to answer the comprehension questions.

Students completed only the non-fiction task by reading the passage silently to themselves first, then they read the passage aloud and a running record was taken, they were then asked the comprehension questions written for each passage. Six types of questions are used, literal, reaction, inference reorganisation, vocabulary and evaluation. Students' pre-test results and their chronological age at the time of the testing are shown in Table 1.

The second pre-test for this study to assess student's fluency rate, comprehension and accuracy on text, was the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability 3rd edition. For this study the Neale (1999) was used to get a standardised score for the student's reading rate, comprehension and accuracy rate. The students were given the Standardised Test Form 1, where they were given "passages to read aloud to an examiner who prompts to a given limit and records performance on a separate Individual Record, designed to facilitate quantitative and qualitative analysis of reading behaviours".(Neale, 1999 ,p6). With each reading the students were timed and after the reading of each passage the examiner asks a set of questions to assess the student's understanding of the text. Table 2 shows the results of the Neale testing of the eight students identified for extra literacy support. After the pre-tests were completed the students for the intervention group were selected for the Repeated Reading and cued retelling strategies.

Table 1: Pre-test score on PROBE

Students	Age 12/3/08		Pre test	PROBE
<i>Intervention</i>	Years & months	Text Reading Age	Reading Accuracy %	Comprehension Score %
A	7y 2m	6-7	95	33
B	8y 1m	6-7	98	33
C	7y 7m	6-7	94	66
D	8y	6.5-7.5	87.5	42
Average score			93	43
<i>Control</i>				
AA	8y 3m	6.5-7.5	95	42
BB	8y 1m	6.5-7.5	97	42
CC	7y 4m	6.5-7.5	94	70
DD	7y 9m	6.5-7.5	93	42
Average			94	49

PROBE reading assessment uses the term ‘reading age’ to refer to the combination of scores for decoding, 96%+ and comprehension, 70%+.

On the PROBE pre-test all four students in the control group had a reading accuracy ranging from 90%-98% on text, one year lower than their chronological age. On the text that is six months lower than the student’s chronological age two students were given the opportunity to read these and their reading accuracy ranged 87%-92%. All the students scored less than 70% on the comprehension tasks, three on

the text that was one year lower than their chronological age and one student scored 80% on that text but scored 42% on the text that was six months lower than his chronological age. The Control group had similar outcomes but scored 70% or lower on the text that was six months lower than their chronological age and their accuracy rate on this text ranged from 94%-97%.(Table 1)

Table 2 Neale Analysis of Reading Ability

Students	Age 17/3/08	Raw score	Percentile rank	Stanine	Reading age
<i>Intervention</i>					
A	7y 1m				
accuracy		24	17	3	6y10m
comprehension		6	11	3	6y5m
rate		32	19	3	6y9m
B	8y1m				
accuracy		24	17	3	6y10m
comprehension		10	22	3	7y1m
rate		19	8	2	6y0m
C	7y7m				
accuracy		21	14	3	6y8m
comprehension		7	12	3	6y7m
rate		20	9	2	6y1m
D	8y0m				
accuracy		16	11	3	6y4m
comprehension		7	12	3	6y7m
rate		21	9	2	6y1m

<u>Control</u>					
AA	8y3m				
accuracy		24	17	3	6y10m
comprehension		9	19	3	6y11m
rate		26	13	3	6y5m
BB	8y1m				
accuracy		29	22	3	7y2m
comprehension		6	11	3	6y5m
rate		55	49	5	8y4m
CC	7y4m				
accuracy		24	17	3	6y10m
comprehension		15	53	5	8y10m
rate		23	9	2	6y3m
DD	7y9m				
accuracy		26	18	3	7y0m
comprehension		9	19	3	6y11m
rate		37	26	4	7y1m

On the Neale Analysis the intervention group were below their chronological age in accuracy, comprehension and reading rate. In the control group, two students were above their chronological age one in comprehension and the other in the reading rate. (Table 2)

Procedures

With repeated reading and cued retelling the students need to become more fluent in their oral reading and be independent in using rereading as a strategy to maintain meaning and improve their comprehension by including cued retelling to help the students to automatically think about the main parts when reading a narrative for understanding and retelling. This study will use repeated reading with a twist by using Readers Theatre to foster fluency and comprehension.

Sessions	Goal of Sessions	Teaching Activity	Student Activity
1&2	Introduce the strategy of repeated reading and cued retelling	Tr reads a well known tale to chn as they follow with a copy of the text and prompt the chn to listen to the story as they will need to answer questions after the read, scaffolded assistance to be provided to students. Tr introduces the tale as a script and allow chn to choose a character each to read.	Students fill in the cued retelling questions and then share with the group. Students read the play taking their parts Students reread the play adding fluency and prosody features.

		<p>Tr models fluency and prosody features and monitors each students' read and give feedback on their errors, fluency and expression.</p>	
3&4	<p>To help students practise the repeated reading and cued retelling strategy on a familiar text.</p> <p>To perform the play for the student's peers.</p>	<p>Tr to model the reading of the play using different expressions for different characters and to keep fluency as a focus. Tr listens and gives feedback to students as they read aloud their part.</p>	<p>Students read their parts out loud to themselves a number of times concentrating on fluency and expression</p> <p>Read the play again adding greater fluency and expression.</p> <p>In group discussion lead to inferential answers</p> <p>Perform the play for their peers</p>
5&6	<p>To help students to articulate the repeated</p>	<p>Read an unfamiliar tale while students</p>	<p>Students articulate what they need to do</p>

	<p>reading strategy and the cued retelling strategy as a way to prepare for a performance of a play.</p>	<p>follow with a copy of their own text.</p> <p>Prompt students to listen to the story as they will need to answer questions, reducing the scaffolded assistance given.</p> <p>Model fluency and expression.</p> <p>Introduce the script for the play and allow students to choose their characters.</p>	<p>to get a play ready to perform.(reread a script adding fluency and expression with each read)</p> <p>Fill in a cued retelling sheet after the teacher has read the new tale.</p> <p>Discuss the answers with the group.</p>
<p>7&8</p>	<p>To encourage students to use the repeated reading strategy automatically to improve their understanding of their character and</p>	<p>Tr listens as students read their parts out loud and gives feedback on their fluency, accuracy and expression.</p> <p>Tr asks inferential</p>	<p>Students read their parts in the play out loud to themselves a number of times.</p> <p>Students answer some inferential questions about the play.</p>

	<p>therefore add relevant expression to their character and the play overall.</p>	<p>questions to extend the students understanding of their character and the play.</p>	<p>Students read the play concentrating on fluency and expression.</p>
<p>9&10</p>	<p>To reinforce the effectiveness of repeated reading and cued retelling strategies for improving fluency and comprehension.</p> <p>To perform the play for the students peers</p>	<p>Tr asks students to articulate what they can do to improve their reading and understanding of what they read.</p> <p>Tr listens to the students read their parts independently and offers feedback</p> <p>Tr listens to the play read by all students and leads peer feedback to help with the final performance before an audience.</p>	<p>Students to articulate the repeated reading and cued retelling strategies by stating, what they do and how this helps them in reading and understanding text.</p> <p>Students reread the play preparing for a performance</p> <p>Students perform the play for their peers.</p>

Three different texts were used during the sessions, they were all fairy tales written in both play and story format and from the PM reading scheme levelled at 16, 17 and 18 respectfully, one tale was familiar and the other two were not. The Fry's Readability Procedure was used to confirm the level of the texts. Only three texts were used in the repeated reading strategy as it allows the students to read the text 3 to 7 times before moving onto a new text. Also the students needed to know their parts well enough to perform and entertain an audience but they were not required to perform without their script

The four students in the intervention group were withdrawn from their classrooms for ten 30 minutes sessions over a four week period. The reason for the sessions being over four weeks, which is not ideal, was due to the teacher's availability to the students, due to her schedule and other roles within the school.

The four students in the control group remained in their classrooms and participated in normal literacy activities. Following the ten sessions for the intervention group all eight students were re-tested using Form 2 from Neale and the same text from PROBE used for pre-testing.

Results

Table 2 Pre and Post tests

students	dob	Earlier intervention	PROBE pre-test	PROBE post test	Neale raw acc pre	Neale raw acc post	Neale per acc pre	Neale per acc post	Neale stan acc pre	Neale stan acc post
A	85m	RR	33%	80%	24	21	17	18	3	3
B	97m	RR	33%	100%	24	16	17	14	3	3
C	91m	RR	66%	70%	21	18	14	17	3	3
D	96m	RR	42%	80%	16	17	11	17	3	3
AA	99m	RR	42%	90%	24	28	17	27	3	4
BB	97m		42%	50%	29	26	22	25	3	4
CC	88m		70%	100%	24	32	17	30	3	4
DD	93m	RR	70%	80%	26	24	18	22	3	3
averages			50%	81%	23.5	22.75	16.625	21.25		

**A<B<C<D = Intervention group.
RR =reading recovery**

AA<BB<CC<DD = Control group

Neale age acc pre	Neale age acc post	Neale raw comp pre	Neale raw comp post	Neale per comp pre	Neale per comp post	Neale stan comp pre	Neale stan comp post	Neale age comp pre	Neale age comp post	Neale raw rate pre	Neale raw rate post
82m	82m	6	11	11	28	3	4	77m	89m	32	23
82m	79m	10	9	22	20	3	3	85m	86m	19	15
80m	80m	7	11	12	28	3	4	79m	89m	20	14
76m	80m	7	6	12	13	3	3	79m	80m	21	18
82m	87m	9	7	19	15	3	3	83m	82m	26	22
86m	86m	6	10	11	24	3	4	77m	88m	55	24
82m	90m	15	11	53	28	5	4	96m	91m	23	19
84m	84m	9	10	19	24	3	4	83m	70m	37	26
		8.625	9.375	19.875	22.5					29.125	20.125

Neale per rate pre	Neale per rate post	Neale stan rate pre	Neale stan rate post	Neale age rate pre	Neale age rate post
19	9	3	2	81	78m
8	4	2	2	72	73m
9	4	2	2	73	72m
9	5	2	2	73	75m
13	9	3	2	77	77m
49	9	5	2	100	78m
9	5	2	2	75	75m
26	12	4	3	85	80m
17.75	7.125				

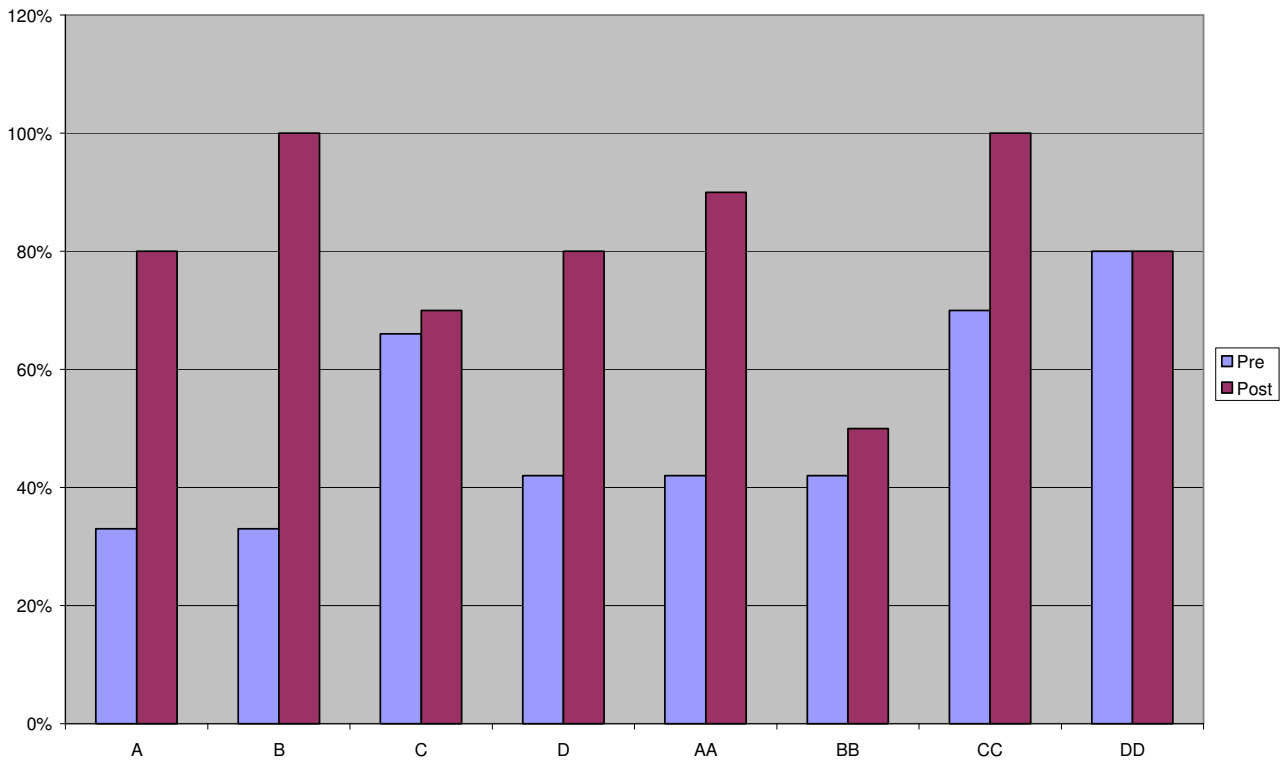
Results indicate support for the hypothesis of teaching 'repeated reading' as a strategy to improve comprehension in Grade 2 students who are accurate decoders. In table 2 the average scores for PROBE increased by 30% from the pre- test to the post- test. All 8 students increased in their reading age and were able to give more detail in the answers to the questions. The average score from the Neale accuracy raw score dropped from the pre- test to the post- test by 0.75%. The dropped in this score was minimal, however 7 of the students read an extra text and this was more difficult and could account for the drop in the accuracy rate as all students were scored more than 16 mistakes which indicates the text was at a 'hard' level but they were able to attempt this text because they had read and scored well on the previous text and this was not the case in the pre- test. The average score for the Neale percentile score on accuracy went up by about 5% indicating 7 of the students lifted their scores from the pre- test to the post- test.

The comprehension score on the Neale, increased in the raw score by 0.7% and the percentile score by 3% which supports the results from the PROBE and together supports the hypothesis that 'repeated reading' is a successful strategy to improve comprehension. The average results from the Neale fluency rate decreased by a large amount for all 8 students'. The average raw score decreased by 9% and the average score for the percentile decreased by 10%. Seven of the students found the third text given in the post text difficult to decode and this increased the time they took to read the text hence adding to the time and therefore bringing down each students fluency rate.

The reading age of seven students stayed the same or improved in the Neale accuracy results. In the Neale comprehension results two students in the control group reading age decreased while the other six students reading age increased. The Neale fluency results were mixed, three students in the intervention group decreased their reading age and in the control group two students decreased their reading age and the other two students stayed the same in their reading age from the pre- test to the post- test.

Figure 1

Pre and Post PROBE

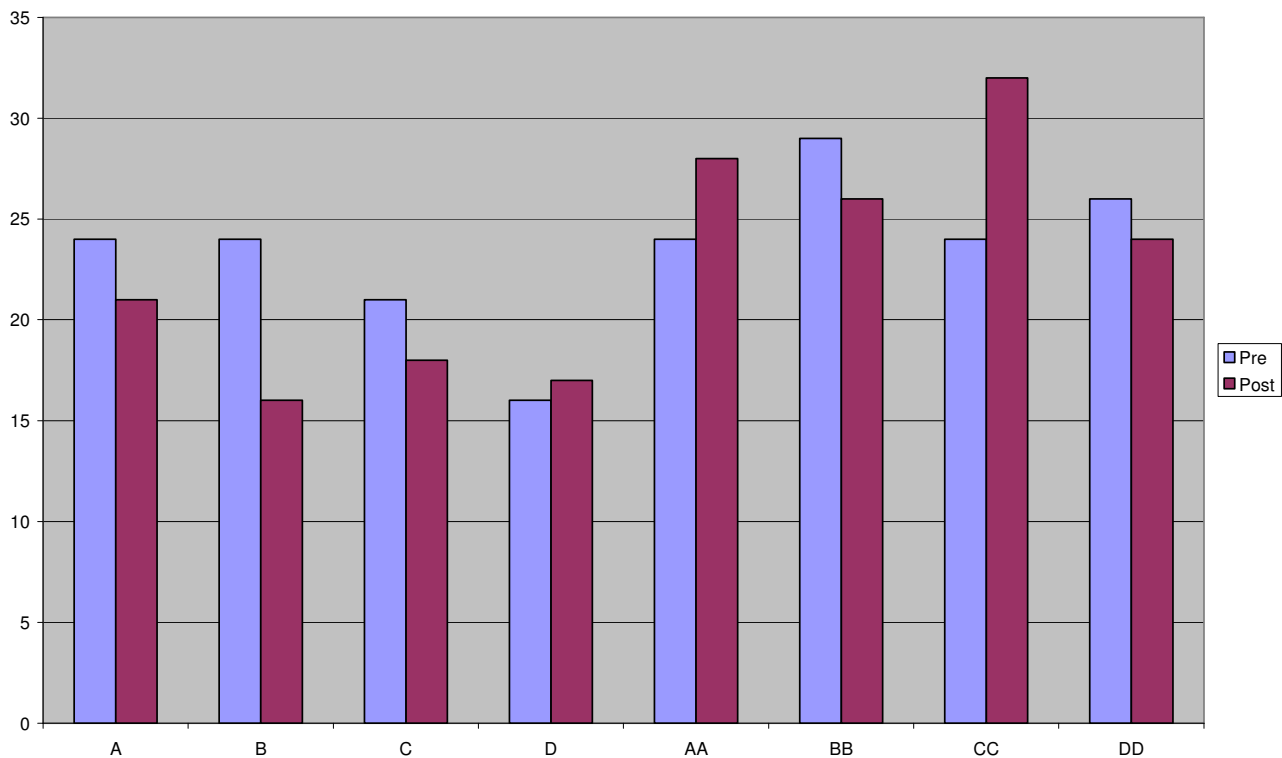


Each student in the intervention and control group improved their scores in the PROBE post -test. (Figure 1) In the pre- test each student was given the fictional text with a reading age of 6-7 years, one student out of the intervention group and four out of the control group were able to read the next reading age text which gave them a reading age of 6.5-7.5. In the post- test all eight students were given the same text that they read in the pre-test and the same questions to answer. All were given the next reading age text and questions to answer and some needed the next text up reading text 12months above their pre test reading age. All eight students, both in the control and intervention groups improved their reading age, by six months and some improved by twelve months. Two of the students in the intervention group improved their reading age by 12 months and the other two students increased their reading age by six months. In the control group three students increased their reading age by 12 months and one student increased by six months. The control group had a better result than the intervention group but with more lessons and the lessons being in a closer time frame and this may have improved all the children in the intervention group by 12 months.

The PROBE test was not used as a fluency test in either the pre or post test but it showed that all the students had a greater understanding of what they were reading. No student referred to the text to look

for any answers but they did have two reads of the text before they were required to answer the questions. All students' self-corrected at least one answer in each of the text that they read and they all gave much more detailed answers than they had in the pre test. All eight students read the text at an easy or instructional level that confirming their strength as decoders.

Figure 2 Pre and Post Neale raw score accuracy



Three students in the intervention group did not improve their accuracy rate and one student only slightly improved their accuracy rate. (Figure 2) The Neale pre-test when given to the students only allowed them to read the first two text as they all scored too many errors to continue to read the third text. However in the post test all students read the first two texts at an 'easy' or 'instructional' level and therefore they had to read the third text and when reading this text they all made 16 or more mistakes. When the three scores were totaled it lowered all the students' accuracy scores. However, because all

eight students were able to read the third text in the post test, this is an indication that their accuracy rate had improved.

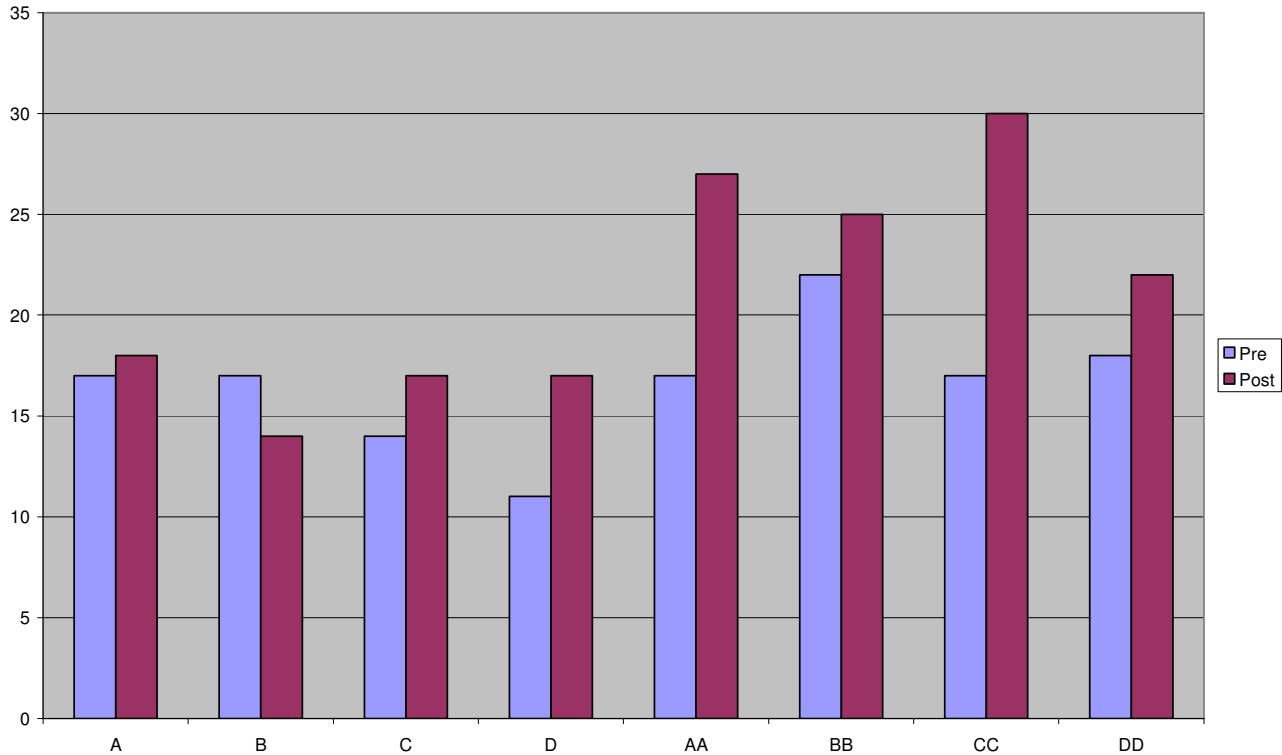


Figure 3

Neale Pre/Post Accuracy percentiles

Figure 3 indicates the percentile rank of each of the eight students in their reading accuracy. Student A in the intervention group increased their ranking by one, while Student B dropped in their ranking by 3. The other two students in the intervention group increased their ranking but all 4 students in the intervention group are in the bottom 25th percentile. The control group all increased their percentile ranking in accuracy putting two students in the bottom 25th percentile and two students in the 25th – 50th percentile. Student B was the only student whose ranking went down and this could have been because she was given the third text in the Neale post test and found it too difficult to decode, she made 33 errors and the main errors were made in mispronunciation.

Figure 4

Neale Pre/Post Comprehension raw scores

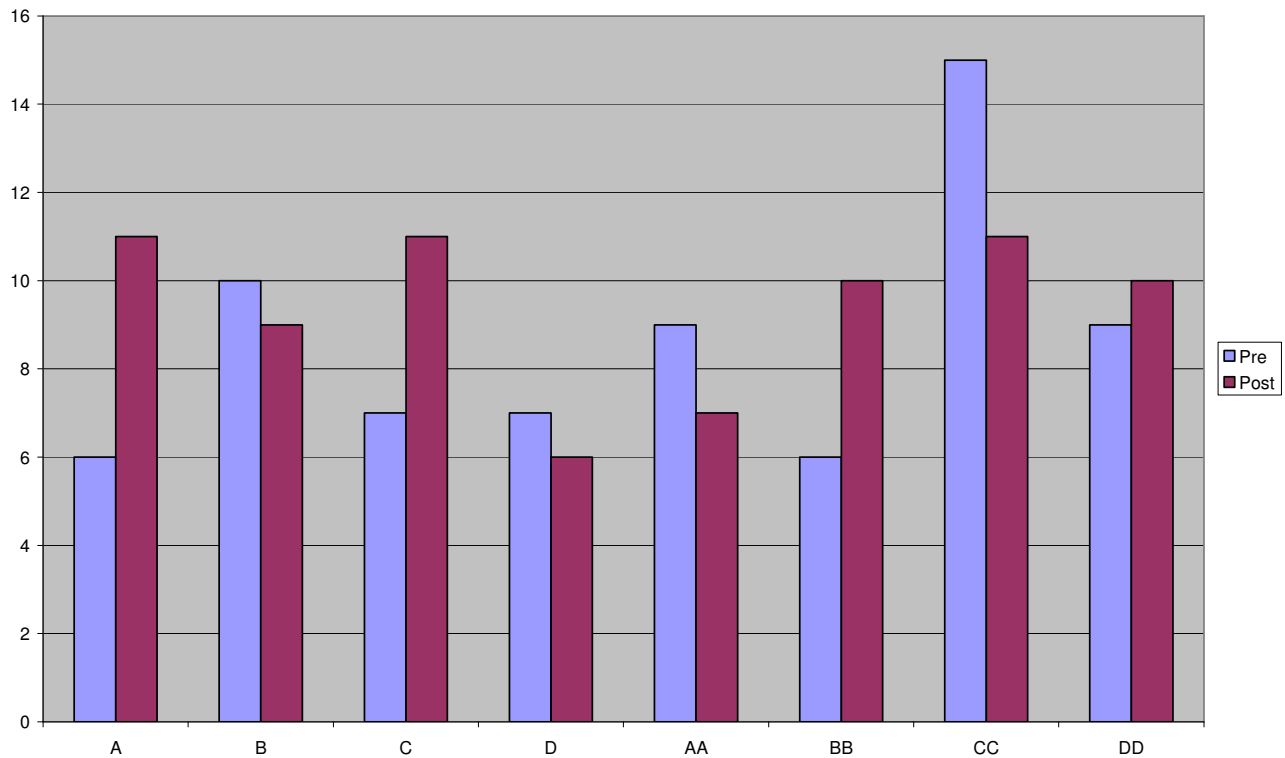
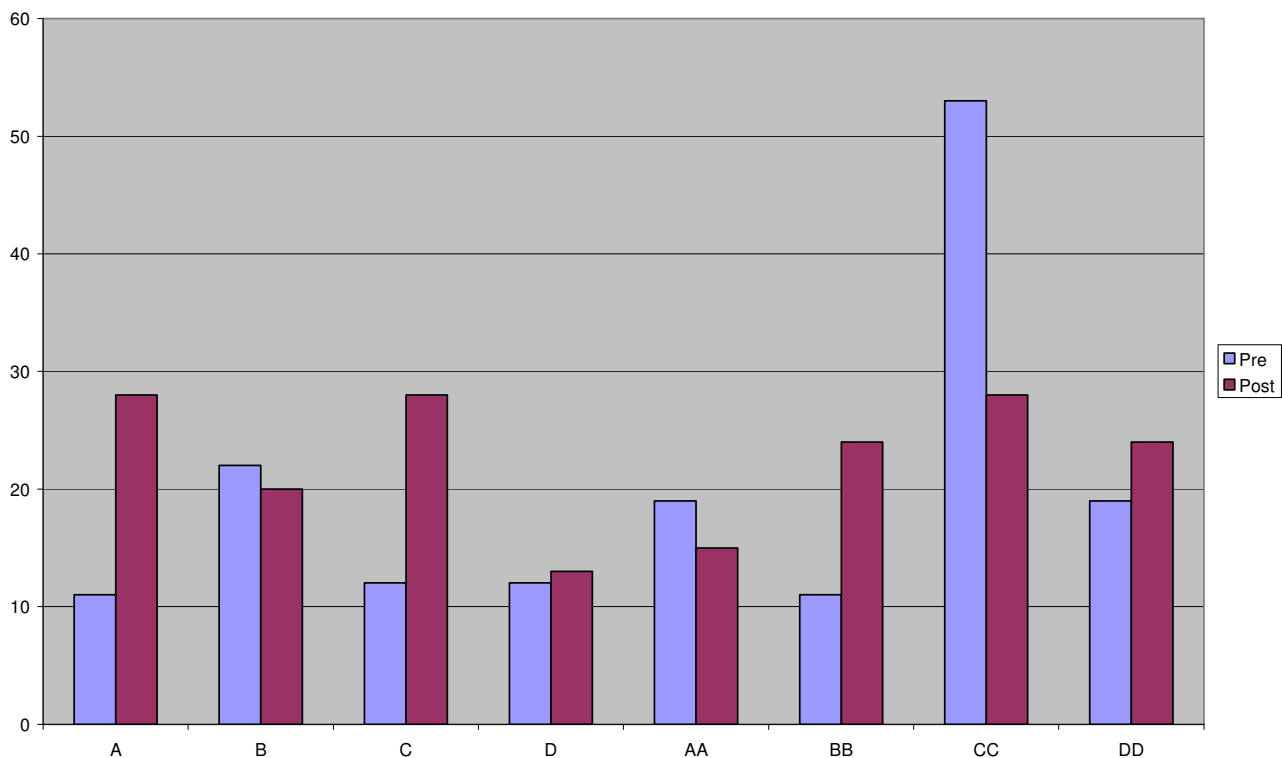


Figure 4 is the main graph to discuss in relationship to ‘repeated reading’ as a strategy to improve comprehension. Two of the students in the intervention group improved in their comprehension score while the other two students’ scores decreased but only slightly. In the control group two students increased their score only by 4 and the other by one. The other two students in the control group both decreased in their comprehension score one by 4 and the other by one. The scores in both groups were not consistent across the two specific groups or as a whole group. In the Intervention group students A and C did not make the State benchmark at the end of Grade one and in the pre- test they scored the lowest in comprehension of all eight students tested. Their improvement in their comprehension score is an indication of the success of the repeated reading strategy as both students really enjoyed the repeated reading of the plays and performing them for other grades. Both students were reluctant to use volume and expression when reading and did not understand what they had read until they were given the

opportunity to read the text three or four times and then they were confident to answer questions and to raise their performance level as they now had an understanding of what the characters were saying and why. Student CC in the control group dropped significantly from the pre test results in comprehension to the post test score. Student CC had an independent variable that may have impacted on her results. The tester had been dealing with this student in another capacity and working through some social issues. These social issues and the fact that the student had been working in a disciplinary situation with the tester may have impacted on Student CC's results. At the time of post testing it was not apparent that there were any difficulties between the tester and the student and therefore the social issues may have been the greater influence over the decrease Student CC's score.

Figure 5 **Neale Pre/Post comprehension percentiles**



Four student's, two in the intervention group and two in the control group are above the bottom 25th percentile however Student CC dropped from the 50-60th percentile. The other four students are in the bottom 25th percentile bur three of these students raised their percentile rank from the pre test to the post test. Students A and C both in the intervention group went from the bottom 25th percentile up to the next quadrant. Student D raised his percentile ranking slightly and Student B dropped their ranking slightly and an independent variable at the time was some social issues in the playground that needed to be sorted out before the testing could begin. It was not possible to move the testing to another day as time was running out to get the information together to write up the research paper.

Figure 6

Neale pre/post raw score rate

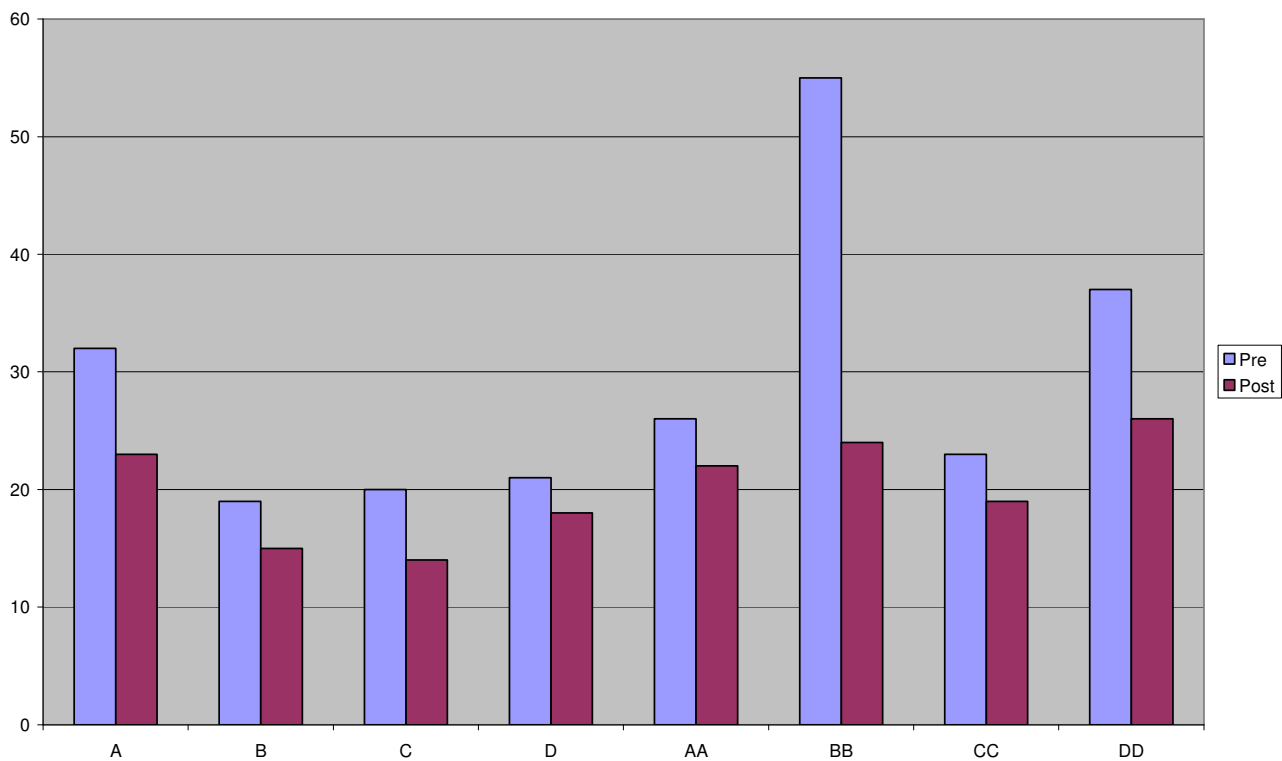
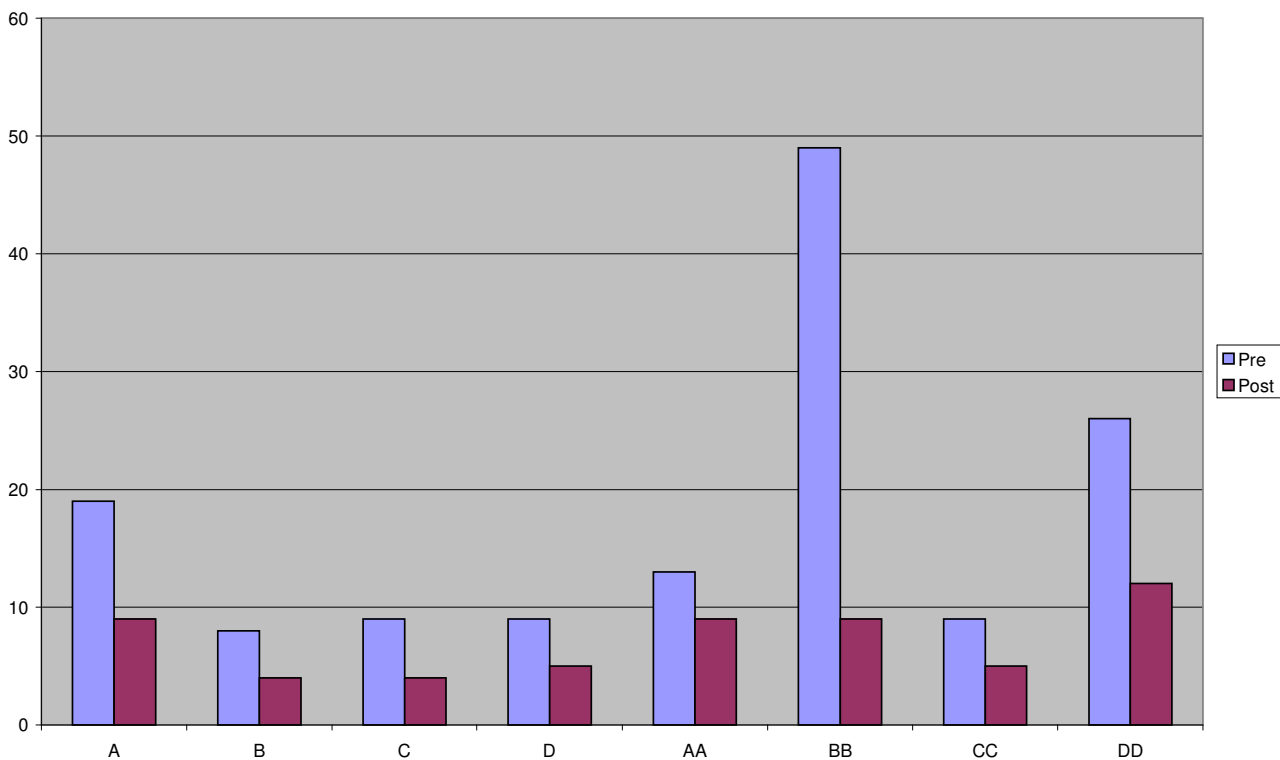


Figure 6 and Figure 7 shows that all eight students dropped in their fluency rate from the pre-test to the post-test. As explained earlier, all the students except for Student D were given the third text in Form 2 of the Neale in the post test. In the pre-test all the students were not able to be given the third test in Form 1 as they all made too many errors or scored badly on the comprehension questions. In the post test seven students were given the third text and found it difficult to decode many of the words towards the end of the passage and they hesitated, repeated or waited for the word from the tester. All of these reading behaviours impacted on the fluency rate of the seven students, as their times were high and these times were added to the times of the other text times but it decreased all their fluency rates. Student D was not given the third text to read as he was not successful in answering the comprehension questions and found the second text 'hard' to read. Student D made the least drop in his fluency rate.

Figure 7

Neale pre/post percentile on Rate



Discussion

In reflecting on the results from the testing and from the teaching session and comments from classroom teachers, there is support for the hypothesis and the research, which suggests that, exposing students to the 'repeated reading' strategy improves their comprehension ability. Students practised the 'repeated reading' strategy and demonstrated some gains in reading comprehension particularly in the PROBE. The students really enjoyed the 'repeated reading' strategy as it was used with 'Readers Theatre'. The intervention would be more successful if it was over a longer period of time and the lessons were consecutive. Students in the control group were all above the state benchmark in their text levels, at the end of Grade One but their comprehension levels were below their reading age. They were able to decode confidently, and use the text more effectively when trying to answer comprehension questions. The intervention group were engaged in the Readers Theatre and were unaware of the 'repeated reading' strategy as an aid to improve their comprehension. This is a group of students that are aware of their inability to read at the same pace and understanding of their peers so they saw this reading time not as intervention but as a chance to 'shine' as readers in front of their peers.

These results support the findings of Tyler and Chard (2000, p166) who wrote that "Readers Theatres provides reluctant readers with an acceptable, legitimate reason to reread the same text several times. Rereading occurs naturally in the context of preparing for the performance." They go on to suggest that using 'repeated reading' in Readers Theatre is a motivational tool to get children to reread the same text a number of times. This was particularly evident by the improvement in the reading ages of students A and C in the post-test results. (Figure 1). Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999, cited in Morra & Tracey (2006, p184) maintain that "Readers Theatre presents repeated reading in a motivational context. Additionally, the researchers reported that 'there is empirical evidence that Readers Theatre promotes gains in oral reading fluency, as well as growth in overall reading proficiency.'" The results from the

Neale did not show an improvement in any of the eight students but rather a drop in all of the student's fluency rate. The 'repeated reading' strategy allowed the students to re read the text three to seven times, however the Neale did not allow this under testing conditions and therefore it is difficult to use the Neale as a testing tool to measure fluency after using the 'repeated reading' strategy. When looking at the 'repeated reading' strategy in this paper it was always intended to be a strategy to improve comprehension and fluency was never an explicit teaching outcome. It is fair to say that the Neale testing format is not cohesive with the 'repeated reading' strategy.

The observations of the intervention group during the ten sessions and particularly during the three performances showed a great improvement in all of the students both in their oral reading fluency, confidence and prosody features. All of the children really enjoyed doing the plays for their peers and the feedback from their classroom teachers was positive in confirming their improvement in fluency, confidence and prosody.

Therrien,2004,p259) concluded his research paper on repeated reading as a strategy for making gains in fluency and comprehension by stating "if repeated reading is intended as an intervention to improve students' overall reading fluency and comprehension (i.e. transfer), there are three essential components: Passage should be read aloud to an adult, corrective feedback on word errors should be given, and passage should be read until a performance criterion is reached." These components are essential to the 'repeated reading' strategy but were not able to be used during the Neale testing procedure but were when using the PROBE. Students in both the intervention and control groups could reread the text twice before they were asked the questions and they also had a copy of the questions in front of them which meant they did not have to try and remember the question as well as the answer. Neale(1999, p47)stated "the results of the tests should not be considered as the definite statement about an individual's abilities in this area, but rather they are samples of reading behaviours." This statement supports the findings of

this paper in that the result of the fluency rate are only one test and indicate the student's reading behaviours under these test conditions but can be in contrast to reading behaviours shown by the same students under different testing conditions.

In the last session, the students in the intervention group were asked what they had learnt about reading a text a number of times. The students were able to articulate that the more they read something the faster they could read it and the more questions they could answer because they could remember what the story was about.

The 'repeated reading' strategy using Readers Theatre was a very enjoyable strategy to engage reluctant readers in. The improvement was apparent in the PROBE post testing results for the intervention group. The intervention group enjoyed the sessions and were very keen for the intervention to continue past the 10 sessions. This was very pleasing as these students do not like reading particularly as they are conscious of their speed and the time it takes to understand what they have read. They want to read something once, answer questions with very little thought for what they have just read and to then move on to the next activity hoping it won't involve reading. Tyler and Chard (2000 p166) support this observation, "Readers Theatre activities are appealing to children for a number of reasons. They are carried out in cooperative format with peers, so the students do not feel isolated and alone as he or she reads. Many children are highly motivated to interact with their peers, and readers theatre allows them a sanctioned means to do so."

The control group also improved in their reading age according to the PROBE post test and this could be contributed to the focus in their classrooms of explicit teaching of comprehension. The intervention group got this explicit teaching in their classrooms and in addition got extra sessions that added and supported their class lessons.

After using the 'repeated reading' strategy and explicitly teaching the components of this strategy that is, read the text the first time and decode any tricky words, the second read is to understand what the story is about and the third read is to read to answer basic questions that are needed to unpack a story for comprehension at all the different levels (i.e literal, inferential etc)

The final results suggest that teaching 'repeated reading' using Readers Theatre is a successful strategy and should be taught to reluctant readers to improve their comprehension and expression. The PROBE test could have been used as a comprehension and fluency test for both pre and post testing. The PROBE test is the only test that is used from Grade 2 to Grade 6 at the school, to score their reading age and to drive the instruction for comprehension.

Keehn's (2003 cited in Morra& Tracey,2006,p184)study and suggested "it may be necessary for instructional intervention aimed at fostering oral reading fluency to be implemented for six to eight weeks if transfer is to be made to unfamiliar texts. Readers Theatre appears to serve as a motivational tool for fluency practice and improvement."

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Appendix

Teaching Sessions

Session 1

- Tr reads “The Three Billy Goats Gruff” PM Level 16, the story to the group and the chn follow with their own text.
- Tr instructs the chn to listen to the story as they will need to answer questions after the tr has read the story to them.
- After listening to the story the chn are given a piece of paper to answer five questions.
 - Who are the main characters?*
 - Where did the story take place?*
 - When did the story take place?*
 - What did the main character/s do?*
 - How did the story end?*
- Chn share the answers with each other and the Tr fills in more information or corrects their answers
- Tr introduces the script and allows the chn to choose their parts.
- Chn read their parts in the play as the play is read through.
- Chn read their parts aloud but to themselves.
- Chn read the play again together.
- Chn take home the play and read their part through at least 3 times.

Session 2

- Chn read through the play each reading their part
- Tr asks the chn what do we need to do to make this play ready to perform to other classes?
- Tr and chn brainstorm all the reading behaviours that would enhance the play; e.g read so we sound like we are talking: use loud voices and lots of expression to make it sound interesting and meaningful
- Tr focus on the reader’s fluency and expression
- Chn reread with stronger voices and more confidence and fluency
- Tr gets out some props and as they are laid out, the five comprehension questions are reasked and the props are put down to represent the answers. E.g where did the story take place? On the hillside. What can we use to show the audience this? green material.
- What else was in the story? A bridge and water. What can we do to show the audience these things? Blue material for water and the gold material for the bridge.
- Using the props, the play was read again with some actions and more expression and volume.
- Tr giving directions to use the props and movements and modelling volume and expression.
- Reread the play without any directions from the Tr.

Session 3

- Chn read through the play again using all the props and instructions.
- Read the play again as the final practise before the performances
- Performed the play four times for the junior classes

Session 4

- Tr reads “Stone Soup” PM level 17the story to the chn while they follow with their own text.
- Tr instructs the chn to listen to the story as they will need to answer questions after the tr has read the story to them.
- After listening to the story the chn are given a piece of paper to answer five questions.
 - Who are the main characters?*
 - Where did the story take place?*
 - When did the story take place?*
 - What did the main character/s do?*
 - How did the story end?*
- Chn share the answers with each other and the Tr fills in more information or corrects their answers
- Tr introduces the script and allows the chn to choose their parts.
- Tr asks the chn “What do we need to do to get this play ready to perform?”
- Chn answer to read the play lots of times: read so we sound like we are talking: use loud voices and lots of expression to make it sound interesting and meaningful
- Chn read their parts in the play as the play is read through.
- Chn read their parts aloud but to themselves.
- Chn read the play again together.
- Chn take home the play and read their part through at least 3 times.

Session 5

- Chn read through the play each reading their part
- Tr focus on the reader’s fluency and expression
- Chn reread with stronger voices and more confidence and fluency
- Introducing some props, the play was read again with some actions and more expression and volume.
- Tr giving directions to use the props and movements and modelling volume and expression.
- Reread the play without any directions from the Tr.

Session 6

- Chn read through the play again using all the props and instructions.
- Read the play again as the final practise before the performances
- Performed the play four times for the junior classes

Session 7

- Teacher asked the chn to remind her of what they need to do while she is reading the new story to them.
- She reminds them that she will be asking questions after the story and they will need to write the answers
- Tr reads “The Brave Little Tailor” PM level 19 to the chn
- After listening to the story the chn are given a piece of paper to answer the 5 questions.
 - Who are the main characters?*
 - Where did the story take place?*
 - When did the story take place?*
 - What did the main character/s do?*
 - How did the story end?*
- The chn are given less support in explaining the questions and the chn are encouraged to use the text to check or find their answers.
- Tr asked chn to explain some of the vocabulary in the text.
 - e.g. **What does a tailor do?**
 - What is a wild boar?**
 - Was the tailor brave?**
- Chn share their answers with the group and the teacher encourages the participants to help expand the answers a little more. The questions are corrected.
- Tr introduces the script and allows the chn to choose their parts. This is a harder text and also longer the chn need to choose 2 characters to read and perform.
- Chn read through their parts as the play is read as a cast.
- Chn read their parts aloud but to themselves
- Chn read the play again together
- Chn take home the play and read through their part at least 3 times

Session 8

- Tr ask chn why do we keep reading the play over and over?
- Tr and chn remind each other of all the reading behaviours that are required to perform a play to an audience.
- Chn read through the play concentrating on fluency, expression and volume
- Tr and chn decide on the props that will be required for this play
- Chn read the play again and are directed on the use of the props and the positions they need to be in for the audience to see them and to perform two roles each.
- Read the play again using all the props and directions
- Re read the play again without any directions from the Tr

Session 9

- Chn read through the play again using the props and the directions and using fluency, expression and good volume.
- Re read the play again as a final rehearsal before going to the junior classes to perform
- Perform the play 4 times in front of four different junior classes.

Session 10

- Discuss with the chn what ‘repeated reading’ means.
- Discuss how we can use this strategy in the classroom to improve our comprehension.
- Tr suggests that the chn read a text 3 times before they answer any questions
 - Eg. *1st read decode tricky words*
2nd read understand what the story is about
3rd read fluency and expression to help with understanding what the story is about
- Chn given a passage from CARS Series 11A to read.
- Chn then practised reading the passage three times.
- After the 1st read talk about any tricky words
- After the 2nd read asked the chn the 5 questions, answers are given orally.
- After the 3rd read where the chn read the passage aloud but to themselves Tr asked if they were all ready to answer some questions
- Chn given the comprehension sheet to fill in
- Together, answer the questions comparing each students answer and ask why they answered accordingly