

Abstract

There is much literature which states that reading aloud is a good thing.

Reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in young student's success in learning to read. Additionally reading aloud improves listening skills, builds vocabulary, aids reading comprehension, and has a positive impact on students' attitudes toward reading. (Routman,1994)

Reading and understanding what is read provides students with a 'Magic Key' to open the pages of the unexplored territories of the written word. It is unfortunate that many students in years three and four have not yet had unlocked for them – or been able to gain meaningful access to - doors which allow entrance into the world of words.

This research, conducted with students in years three and four who require support in how to go about comprehending texts, centres on a strategy consisting of being read to by a knowing other, reading aloud themselves in pairs, using detailed cue cards and discussion focussing on the text.

This hypothesis is as follows:

Reading aloud to year three and four students, reading aloud in pairs and discussing the text improves comprehension and self-efficacy.

The results partly support the above hypothesis. Improvement in students' comprehension was significant; however improvement in self efficacy was shown to be minimal. Implications from these findings do suggest that structuring lessons which give students the opportunity to listen to modelled reading aloud of a text, reading together in pairs, together with the opportunity to discuss what they have read, would provide a scenario for further success.

Introduction

Reading is a complex activity which requires, as Munro (2007) suggests in his Multiple Levels of Text Processing Model, attention to be directed at each of the following levels: Word, Sentence, Conceptual, Topic and Dispositional, as well as to Self Management and Control strategies, Existing knowledge including Oral Language and Experiential Knowledge, Sensory input to the knowledge base and Motor aspects of expressive language. Reading Comprehension is currently a problem in years three and four for a number of students. Some students, who have difficulty caused by directing too much attention to decoding words, are not yet able to focus on the tasks of comprehending. They may be unable to grasp what a text is about or to elaborate, infer, visualise, paraphrase, summarise or generally prepare for the task of reading. They may not be able to ask

themselves questions which answer to the purpose of why they are reading including the Why? What? Where? When? and Who? of a text. Connections between texts and their lives may be difficult for these students to see, as they have not yet grasped the tasks involved in the comprehending work which enables comprehension to take place, and so generally do not feel successful as readers.

The focus of this research is to extend understandings of the possibility that hearing material read, firstly by a teacher and then in a peer situation followed by focussed discussion, may have a positive influence on students' ability to gain deeper meaning from fiction texts. The research endeavours to ascertain the extent to which these factors might improve students' comprehension and self efficacy. Miller (2002) asserts the following:

Reading Aloud is one of the most important things I do. Now I know reading aloud motivates kids to want to learn to read, extends their oral language, and gives them opportunities to connect new information to what they already know. And reading aloud offers teachers opportunities to:

- *Share a variety of genres;*
- *Model fluency and reading behaviours;*
- *Construct meaning through think- alouds and offer children the time and tools to do the same;*
- *Build community;*
- *Share with kids our love of reading and learning (page 29.)*

There are few studies which directly relate to the topic chosen as the basis for this research. Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita and Goldstein (1997) researched the effect of Interactive Reading Aloud to Israeli First Graders and found that, '*Classroom story reading to first-grade students led them to increase in decoding, reading comprehension, and picture storytelling*'. The findings suggested that '*exposure to a series of stories initiates a process (a magic secret) which stimulates young readers to reread these books*'.

Marie Clay (2005) recommends that '*in some instances teachers may first read the new book to the child thereby providing oral input*'. (p.103) Reading Recovery lessons include the reading aloud of at least three familiar books by the child at the beginning of each session as this allows success to be achieved regularly for each child.

Anderson, Heibert, Scott and Wilkinson claimed that, '*the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children*'.(1985)

There is little current research which seeks to directly address the link between improved self efficacy and improvement in comprehension and reading aloud to and by students. Specific research which links the aspects of reading aloud to

improvements in both comprehension and self efficacy is yet to be further explored.

Self efficacy, defined by Bandura as '*the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations*' (1995) is relevant to particular settings. In the school setting, where students have been seen by themselves and others as the struggling lower group (perhaps the '*wombats*' group), their view of themselves is likely to have been managed by successive situations which continually label them as unsuccessful. The self scripts and labels they have had imposed, or have allowed themselves to be given, are deeply ingrained. Whether this leads to later alienation from the work of school would be a further study worth pursuing.

Thus this research seeks to address the following:

Reading aloud to year three and four students, reading aloud in pairs and discussing the text improves comprehension and self-efficacy.

Method

Design

The study employs a case study OXO design, in which gains in comprehension and self efficacy are monitored, following a series of lessons in which students listen to a text modelled by the teacher; read in pairs to a partner; then discuss with the group the where, what, why when and who of the content of the narrative text passages.

The study compares two groups of students – a teaching group who received 10 teaching sessions and a control group who were tested at the beginning and at the conclusion of the time period. Pre-testing was carried out prior to the teaching sessions, which were conducted at the rate of 4 a week for 2 weeks and the final 2 in the third week. The students were withdrawn from their normal schedule and taught in the library for 30 minute periods. Sessions were usually taken in the afternoons and were not part of the literacy block. Control and Teaching Group students continued to participate in their regular classroom program. Student K of the Control Group also continued to receive twice weekly reading intervention sessions in addition to the classroom program. Post-testing was carried out in the two weeks immediately following the teaching sessions.

Participants

All students selected attend a small inner suburban school. The 12 participants were selected on the basis of having lower scores on the TORCH test, The South Australian Spelling Test, the Burt Word Reading Test and accuracy on Running Record Scores than many of their peers in year 3 and four. Six were allocated to the Teaching Group and 6 to the Control Group. Two of the Teaching Group and three of the control group had participated in various intervention programs such as Reading Recovery, Bridges and ERIK during their time at school. Their age in months, entry level reading ability as shown on unseen Alpha Assess Texts, and on TORCH Comprehension Test South Australian Spelling Test and the Burt Word Reading test, as well as their Self Efficacy scores, have an ESL background or have received any form of intervention are shown in Table 1 below.

Pre Intervention Scores Table 1

Student	Age in Months	ESL	Intervention	Text Level Alpha Assess	Torch score Pre	Burt Pre	Self Effic. Pre	South Aust. Spelling
A T	98	No	Yes	20	13	37	61	12
B T	96	No	Yes	22	20	37	63	24
C T	107	No	Yes	28	13	68	65	36
D T	103	Yes	No	28	34	77	68	41
E T	103	No	No	28	28	51	64	36
F T	93	No	No	28	20	63	65	35
G C	108	No	No	28	28	67	71	35
H C	98	No	No	28	39	87	58	39
I C	94	No	No	28	37	83	63	37
J C	99	No	Yes	21	16	33	53	25
K C	110	No	Yes	26	28	43	59	24
L C	118	No	No	28	28	71	66	24

Teaching Group shaded yellow: Control Group shaded white:

Materials

Instruments.

The following instruments were used to assess students prior to the teaching intervention. Those marked with an asterisk were administered both before and after the intervention:

- Burt Word Reading Test**. The Burt Reading Test was administered pre and post intervention to both the teaching and control groups. Students individually read the words, which diminish in size as the words become increasingly difficult to the test administrator. (New Zealand Council of Educational Research)
- TORCH Comprehension Test**. (Mossenson, Hill & Masters, 1987)
- Self efficacy Test** (Adapted from Chapman J.W. and Tunmer W.E, 2000) Score created by teacher (1 to 5)
- Independent Text Level ascertained by taking a running record using unseen Alpha Assess Texts for each child in both the Teaching and Control groups
- South Australian Spelling Test. This test shows the level of understanding of spelling students have in regard to spelling rules, base words, word origins and knowledge of various letter-sound combinations.

Teaching Materials

- 10 texts listed in Teaching sessions see Appendix 1
- Taped versions of 4 of the passage
- Tape recorder
- Cue Cards: Who, What, When Where, Why -see appendices 2,3,4,5,6
- Highlighter pens

Procedure

- The intervention incorporated 10 teaching sessions which lasted 30 minutes each. The lessons were conducted over a three week time span.
- Students were withdrawn from class and attended lessons in the library.
- Ten narrative texts were chosen and the Fry Measure of Readability was used to determine the suitability of the reading material. The texts were graded with those at the second year of school being used first, followed by passages at the 3rd, 4th and 5th years of schooling being subsequently introduced as the students became more confident and were increasingly familiar with the procedure followed in each teaching session.

Sessions followed the format outlined in table 2 below:

SESSION FORMAT						
Teacher orientates students to text	Teacher models reading aloud text/ or chn listen to taped reading of text	Cue Cards introduced and then revisited as outlined in appendix 1	Students reminded to focus on content of cue cards as appropriate	Students read text aloud in pairs	Teacher and students discuss text attending to explicit content relating to appropriate cue cards	Students highlight answers to questions which relate to content of cue cards followed by discussion of these answers with the group Highlighting was done only in sessions 5,7,9,

Table 2

Results

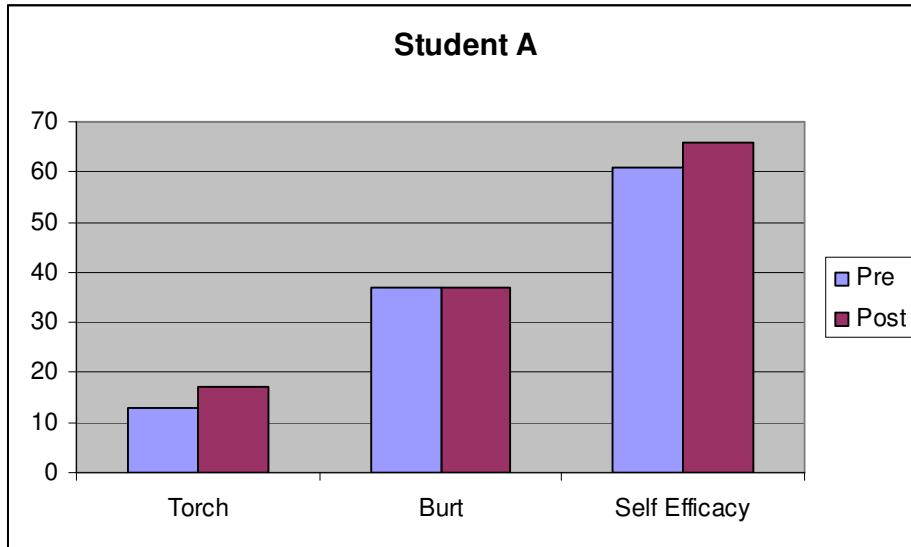
Members of the Teaching Group showed varied impact of the teaching sessions. Each child in the Teaching Group showed improvement in the results of their Torch Comprehension assessment. Slight improvements were also found on the Self Efficacy scale and on the BURT word reading test - although word reading was not an explicit focus taught during the sessions.

- Prior to the commencement of the teaching sessions, the Teaching Group had lower scores on most tasks than the control group participants, as is shown by the sum total of their scores:
 - Torch pre-test: Teaching Group – 128. Control Group - 176.
 - Burt pre-test: Teaching Group – 333. Control Group – 384.
 - Self Efficacy pre-test: Teaching Group – 386. Control Group – 370.
 - As is evident self efficacy was the exception.

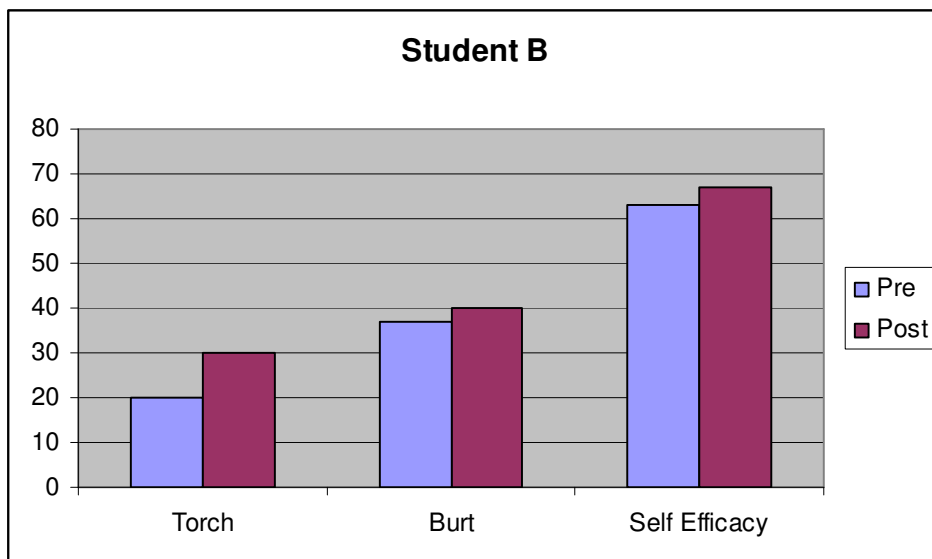
The major gains were seen in the raising of the Torch score. The scores for each assessment have been averaged out. The following are among the findings:

- The principle finding was that the Teaching Group improved by 34 % as a whole when averaged out and the Control group by 6 % on the Pre and Post TORCH scores. This finding was verified by the rate of improvement for individual students; e.g the greatest % increase was by student E in the teaching group with an increase of 50% followed closely by Student B of this group who attained a 39% increase while Student D's improvement was minimal.
- It is worth noting that Student D was the only child in the group from an ESL background and that involvement in the Project was as a result of a direct request from the parents who were concerned about the ability of their child to comprehend text. Post testing showed that the decoding skills of this child were shown to have increased by 10 words on the Burt score.
- Overall the Burt score improved by 8% in both the Teaching and Control Groups on the averaged scores. Some Individual showed marked improvement; eg Student D.
- The self efficacy scores of students in both the control and the teaching groups when averaged out shows improvement of only 6% and 4%. Given that these students were chosen because of their progress in reading (5 of the total of twelve have received or are receiving intervention) and that they are currently the product of the self-scripts they have and that their learned behaviours over their time at school are quite set, they are unlikely to show marked improvement in such a short space of time.

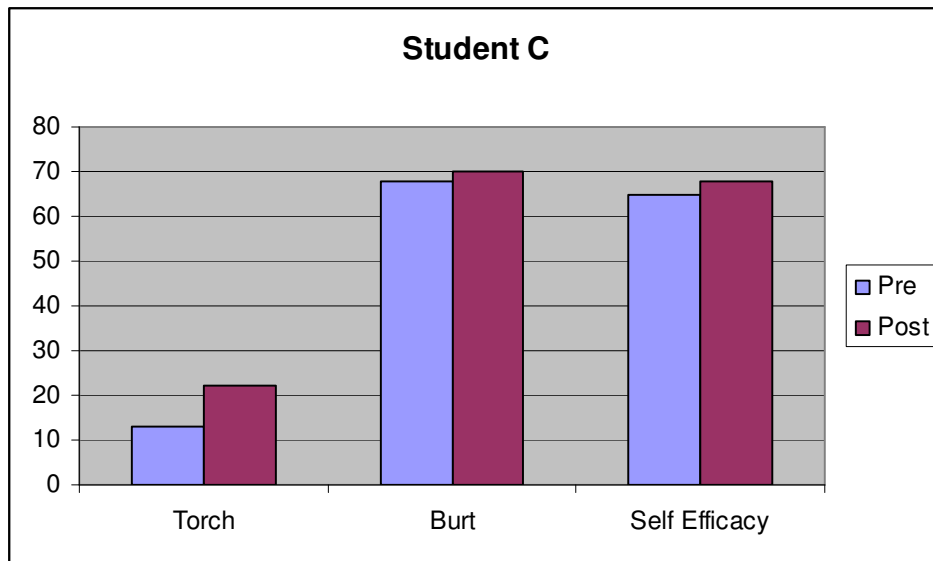
Learning Trends for Individual Students



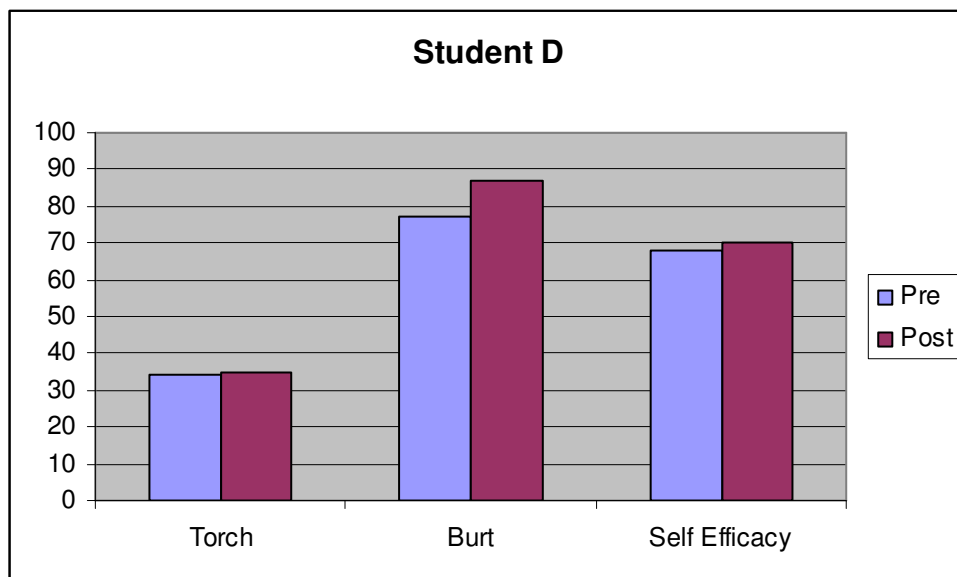
Results for Student A shows an increase on both the Torch and Self Efficacy Scales. This student has received intervention during earlier years of schooling. These results may also show the benefit of this current small group intervention. The confidence of this student may have increased because the text was read first by the teacher. The hard work of decoding the text was removed for this student, thus freeing up attention so it could be directed towards the meaning.



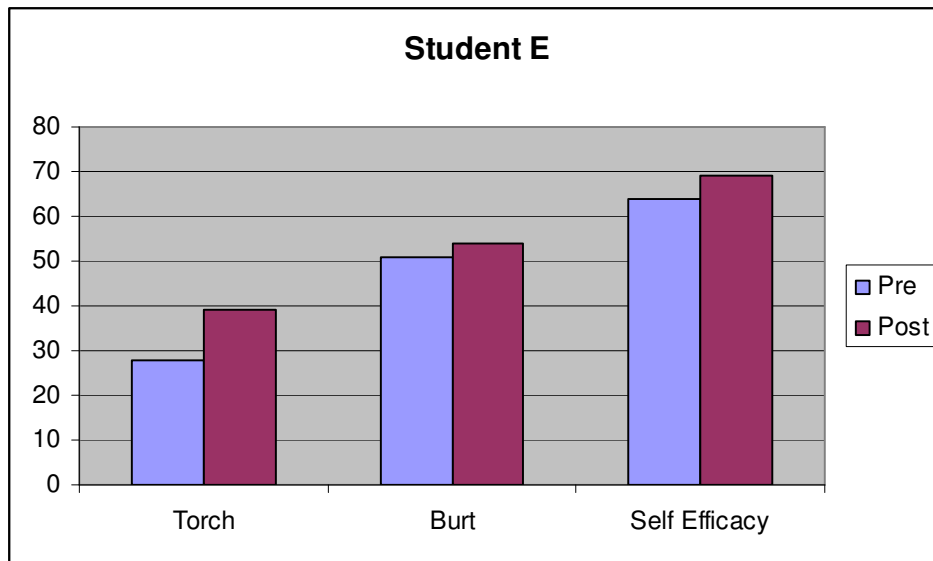
Improvement on all scores was shown by Student B. Improvement on Torch was most marked. The use of cue cards which provided for attention to be directed to the specifics of the Who, Where, Why, When and What of a text, may have assisted the improvements shown on Torch. A probable increase in self efficacy may be caused by enjoying working in the small group with a specific task which followed a regular format.



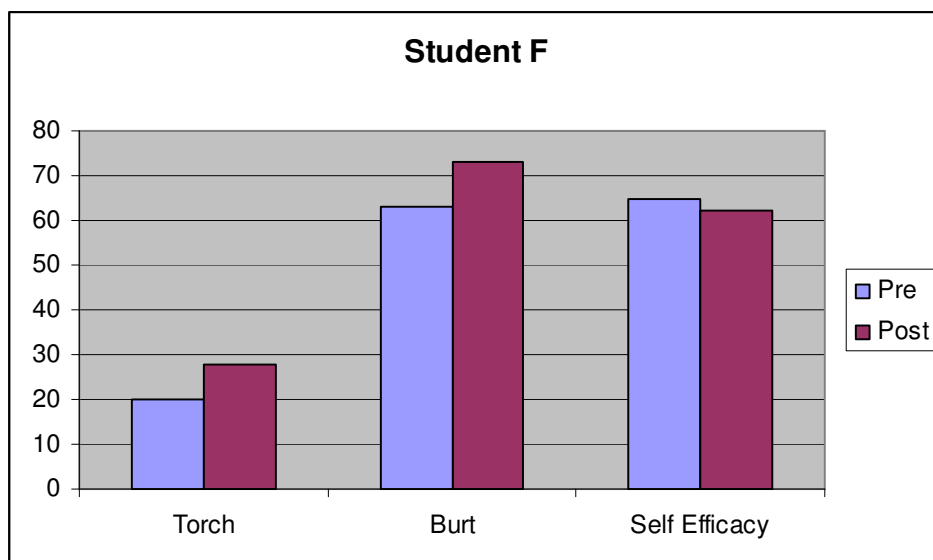
Improvement in all areas was shown by Student C, with the most noticeable difference being on the Pre and Post Torch Scores. It is interesting to note that although Word reading was not a focus of this research the scores on Burt by this student have increased slightly.



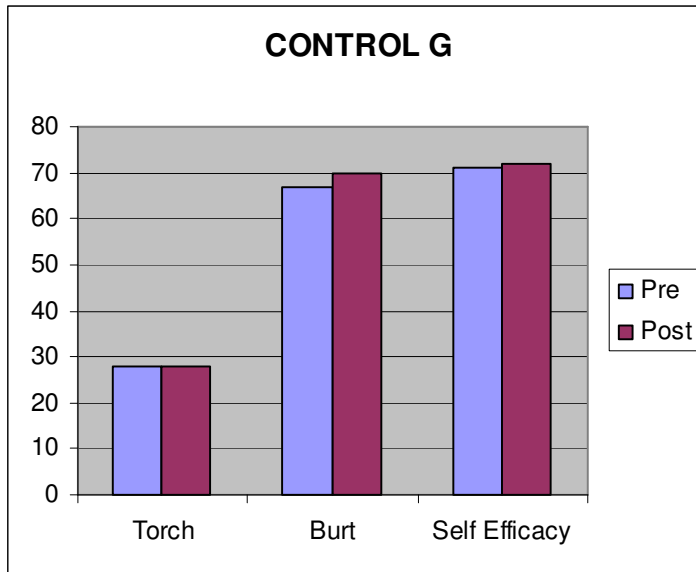
Student D of the Teaching Group showed only very minor improvement on the Torch Scale. Student D is the only student from this group who has an E.S.L background. As has been noted above, this student was included in the research after a direct request from the parents. The student made comment during Burt post testing that the test was a source of some enjoyment and delight. Interestingly, there was a slight increase in the Self Efficacy score of this student.



The data shown for Student E reflects improvement in all areas. The most significant improvement being shown on the Torch Test. While one probable reason for this improvement may be the current small group intervention and the fact that students heard each text read prior to their paired reading, Classroom teaching is also very explicit.



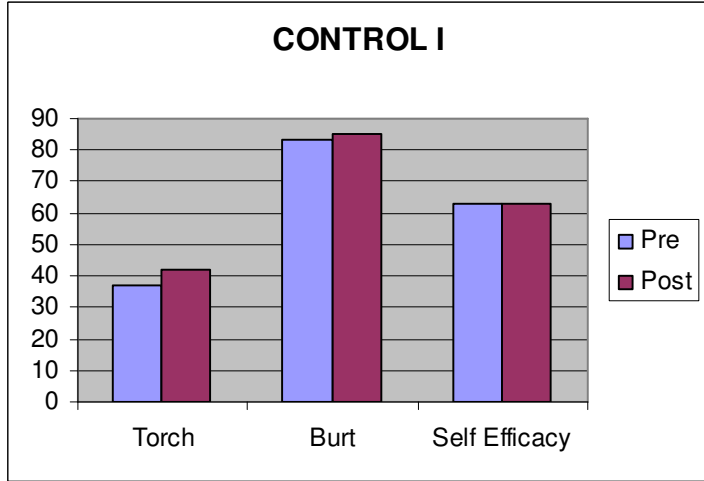
While showing marked improvement on the Torch and Burt tasks, it was disappointing to note that student F showed a lower Self efficacy score in post as compared to the pre-testing. This may have been due to the emotional stress caused by retesting.



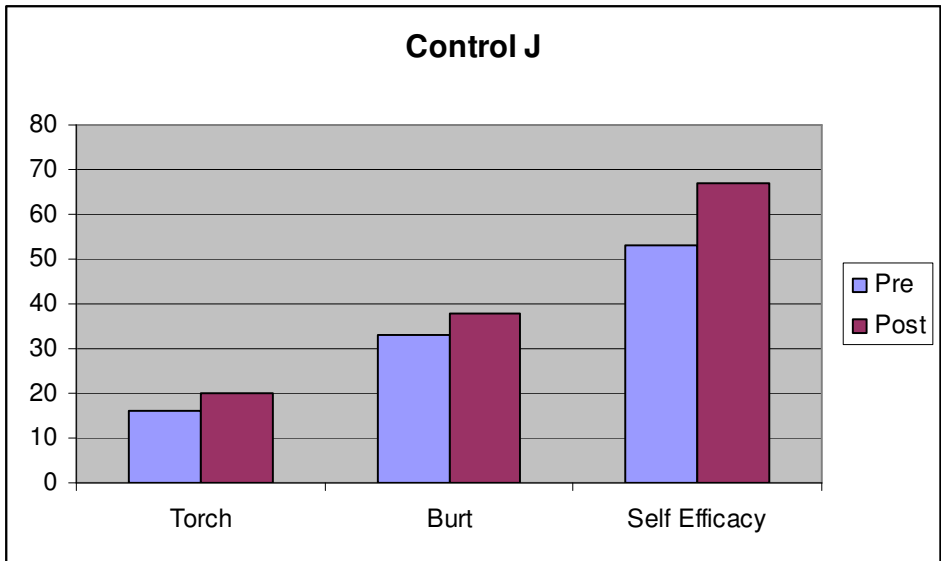
Control group student G retained the same. Torch Score and showed only marginal improvement on the Burt and Self efficacy scores.



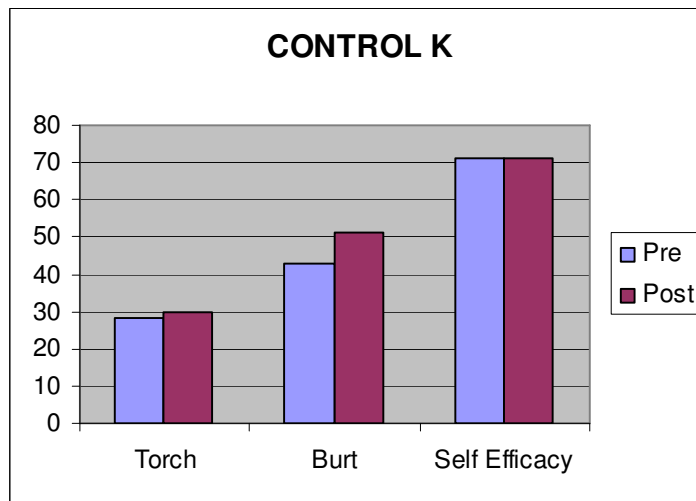
Control group student H scores reflected only marginal improvement on both Burt and on the Self efficacy score. This student's score on Torch remained the same in both the Pre and Post Tests.



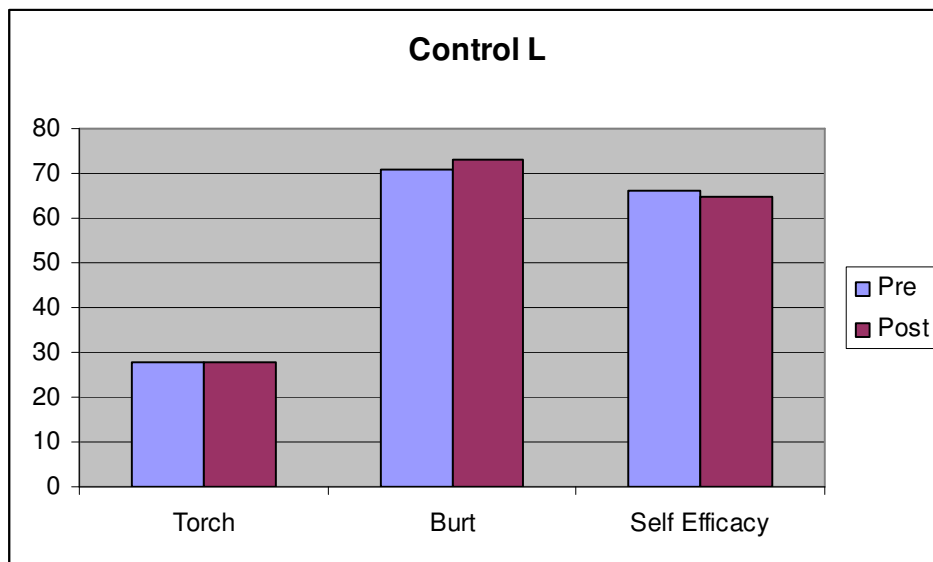
Control group student I's scores reflected no improvement on the self efficacy score and slight increases on both Burt and Torch.



Control group student J showed improvement on each task. This student was a former Reading Recovery student. Currently this student is a major focus of the class teacher's attention during focused literacy sessions each day, so this, plus the teacher providing constant affirmation may have led to the significant improvement on the Self Efficacy scale.



While showing marked improvement on the Burt test, Control Group student K showed only minor improvement on the Torch test and no improvement on the Self Efficacy score. This student participated in various interventions since beginning school e.g. ERIK, Reading Recovery and Bridges. Currently Student K is attending twice weekly intervention on Bridges. However, given that during the previous year the Torch Passages were unable to be attempted by this student, it is pleasing that this score was achieved and that improvement was made.



Control group student L retained the same score on Torch, showed a slight gain on Burt and a lower score on the Self efficacy score than on the Pre-test. A possible reason for this is that this student may have suffered emotional distress caused by the additional testing.

Discussion

The project would seem to have demonstrated that the claim of the hypothesis may well be a valid one, at least that it is worth more intensive exploration; namely that, for the Teaching Group, the strategy involving the teacher's reading text aloud, having students read in pairs, working with cue cards and discussing the text did successfully raise the comprehension levels. It has also, to a minor degree, raised the Self Efficacy scores. In that regard, the variance between the two groups is slight; increases of 6 % and 4 % respectively for the Teaching and Control Groups. The variance on the Torch score between the Teaching and Control groups, when averaged out, points to a 34% increase by the Teaching Group and a 6 % increase by the Control Group. This is the most significant result.

One significant variable which could possibly account for improvement in Torch scores may have been that the pre test of the Torch test of the passage *Lizards Love Eggs* was the first time each of the students in the Teaching Group had been administered the Torch test. The post test, administered some twelve weeks later, was thus the second time this group had been exposed to this test. They had prior knowledge of the content and had previously attempted this task. Three members of the Control Group, being in year 4, had been exposed to this task during previous assessments in both this and the previous year.

There are of course many other factors which may also have contributed to the performance of each group. These include the following:

- explicit teaching of comprehending skills by the class teacher as part of the regular scheduled literacy block;
- acknowledgement and affirmation by the class teacher of effort put in and progress made by each student as part of regular reading and writing sessions;
- the fact that both groups were exposed during the time period to their regular focused teaching during the literacy block;
- focused small group teaching which the Teaching Group experienced in a setting removed from the classroom;
- the nature of the intervention: the fact the students were first read to, and then read aloud a series of graded materials at a level of increasing difficulty and discussed what they had just read.

The intervention strategy, as has been noted, involved a range of interconnected activities, Whilst reading aloud and being read to are key, it also included a significant amount of structured discussion which, admittedly, was closely related to *reading aloud*. Assuming that the intervention was successful, the question still remains as to which aspect was the most change producing. Indeed, was it a single aspect or was it the combination of the elements. Allington and Johnson (2002) found that in high achieving classrooms, students spent significant amounts of time engaged in discussions about their reading and learning. The

students in the intervention group, did, during these intervention sessions, spend significant time in discussion of specific sections of a text after they had been read to- and read aloud themselves. This may have been the most significant factor contributing to the improvement of comprehension scores. However, as has been noted, there is a body of literature which asserts the overwhelming value of reading aloud.

One way of interpreting the growth in comprehension scores of the Teaching Group is that they had made explicit for them a way to plan how to read, so that as Munro's (2007) 'multiple levels of text processing' model asserts, they were using self management strategies which made the reading task easier for them. It provided students with a way to get ready for reading - to see the purpose for it. The results give credence to the notion that as proposed in the text *Effective Learning Practice in Years 1-4* (2003).

Reading aloud to students frees them from the labour of decoding and supports them in becoming active listeners, totally engaged and immersed in the text.

Implications for Teaching Practice. The following are possible implications of the project findings for teaching practice:

- have schools incorporate the practice of reading aloud – to students by the teacher and by students to each other, not only in allocated literacy sessions but in all areas of the curriculum;
- structure time for detailed discussions about the content of what students have heard and read;
- provide specific cue cards which assist students to organize themselves to get ready for reading; (these may include cues cards to do with visualizing, using synonyms, or paraphrasing)
- incorporate into literacy lessons the teaching of positive self-scripts in order to improve their self-efficacy

For further research. As has been claimed above, this study, whilst making a plausible case for more detailed and structured research on reading aloud.

Additional areas for research include the following:

- Self efficacy could be a more focused area of study. It is not surprising that self efficacy scores were raised by only 4% and 6% respectively, given that students have had a three or four years to believe what they so clearly do about their ability to engage in the work of reading.
- Examine why it was it that Burt word reading scores increased in all students except one - although word reading wasn't a specific focus of this study?
- Investigate the reasons why students may have felt marginally more confident after intervention sessions.

This research has shown the value of incorporating being read to, reading aloud and having discussions about what was read with others.

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Appendix 1 Teaching Unit:

The main focus of this teaching unit is improving the comprehension and self efficacy

Lessons	Text	Procedure
Lesson 1	The Holiday Surprise P.M. Series Fry Readability: 2	Explain purpose of lessons. To improve comprehension of texts read Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Introduce detailed cue cards: <u>Main Focus on WHO? Why? Where? What? When?</u> Group read text again in pairs. Discuss possible answers to cues
Lesson 2	John Brown Rose and the Midnight Cat. Jenny Wagner Fry Readability 2	Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text. Group listens to taped version of the text. Reference made to Cue Cards. <u>Main focus on Why?</u> Reference to Who Group reads text aloud in pairs. Discuss possible answers to cue cards
Lesson 3	Harry and the Tow Truck PM Series Fry Readability 2	Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Students read aloud in pairs Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? <u>Main focus on Where?</u> Discuss possible answers to cues.

Lesson 4	The Helpful Monkey Fry Readability 2	<p>Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Students read aloud in pairs</p> <p>Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where <u>Main focus on What?</u></p> <p>Discuss possible answers to cues.</p>
Lesson 5	Vanessa's Butterfly Fry Readability 3	<p>Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Students read aloud in pairs</p> <p>Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where? What? <u>Main focus on When</u></p> <p>Discuss possible answers to cues</p>
Lesson 6	The Big Balloon Festival Fry Readability:3	<p>Tr provides orientation to text. Group listens to taped version of the text. Group reads text again in pairs.</p> <p>Discuss possible answers to cue card questions. Who? Why? Where? What? When?</p>
Lesson 7	Tom and the Sack Fry Readability 3	<p>Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where? What? When? Group reads text aloud in pairs. Group highlights answers to questions asked by the teacher.</p>

Lesson 8	Olive's Room Fry Readability 4	Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where? What? When? . Group reads text aloud in pairs. Discuss possible answers to cues.
Lesson 9	The Lonely Giant Literacy Links Fry Readability 4	Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where? What? When? Group reads text aloud in pairs. Discuss possible answers to cues. Group highlights answers to questions which can be found in the text
Lesson 10	Henny Penny Fry Readability 5	Procedure: Tr provides orientation to text Tr reads aloud text to group Look at detailed cue cards: Who? Why? Where? What? When? Group reads text aloud in pairs. Discuss possible answers to cues.
Post teaching Testing	Burt Self efficacy Torch	

Appendix 2



EVENT



HAPPENING

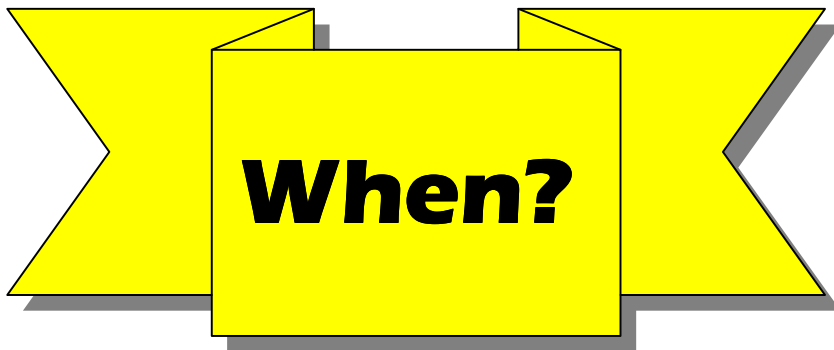
What?

I went to....





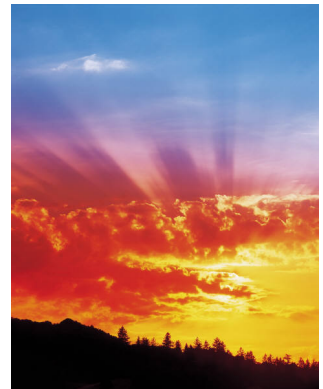
DATE



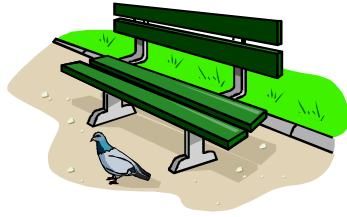
DAY

TIME

NIGHT

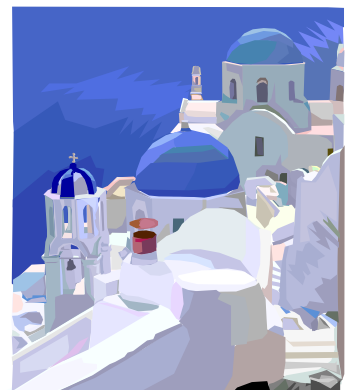


Appendix 4



PLACE

SETTING



Appendix 5



ANIMAL



Who?

PERSON

CHARACTER



Appendix 6

