

Abstract

Students who experience problems decoding a text often also experience difficulties comprehending the author's message. Literal comprehension is a skill that is vital for all students if they are to achieve success. Making a visual image of a story assists students to understand an author's message and allows them to draw upon their own experiences to make connections with the text. The RIDER strategy (Clark, Deshler, Schumaker, Alley and Warner, 1984) is one way of assisting students to literally comprehend an author's message through making a mental image. Research suggests that this strategy improves a student's understanding of the story by making connections with their own experiences.

The hypothesis of this study is that **teaching visualization, through the use of the RIDER method to at risk Year 2 students, increases literal comprehension levels.** In this study the students were taught the acronym, RIDER, to assist them to literally comprehend a text. RIDER assists students to: **R**ead, **I**magine, **D**escribe, **E**valuate and **R**ead on.

This study involved the comparison of two groups of Year Two students, a control group and a targeted teaching group. The targeted teaching group received the instruction about visualization through a series of ten consecutive lessons. All of the students were assessed prior to the teaching through a TORCH test, a Visualization test and a Self-Efficacy test. This testing also occurred after the teaching.

The results of this Action Research Study imply that the use of the RIDER strategy will help a student to improve their literal comprehension skills.

Introduction

There are many different ways that a reader develops their ability to gain meaning from a text. Beginning readers decode a text, word by word and they then develop fluency, phrasing and comprehension. These skills usually develop naturally for most students, however for some students; it takes all their efforts to decode a text, that they cannot recall the meaning of the text when they get to the end of a sentence or paragraph.

The most important measure of successful reading is to understand the author's message. This is known as comprehension. Comprehension involves many elements-enhancing learning and understanding, acquiring knowledge, monitoring understanding and developing insight. (Silverii S. 2006) An efficient reader uses a variety of strategies to comprehend a text, such as making connections with their own experiences, questioning the text and making inferences from the author's message. These strategies are difficult for a reader with low levels of literal comprehension.

Literal comprehension refers to understanding the main ideas in a text, i.e. what actually happened in the text. Young students are often able to literally comprehend texts when they are beginning readers as the material they read is likely to be based on vocabulary and concepts that are familiar to them. (Sanders, M. March 2006) At risk students are often able to decode simple texts but as texts develop in complexity, these students experience some difficulty understanding (comprehending) what it means. Laura A. Stahl (2000) suggests: "reading comprehension tasks are not only among the most difficult tasks that students with deficits in reading struggle with but are also among the most important life skills that all children need to develop in

order to function successfully in society.”(Boyle, 1996) Furthermore, research has shown that weak decoding skills are a common cause of poor reading comprehension. (Sanders, M. 2001)

Students with low levels of comprehension are often unable to make links with the text. An engaged reader makes these connections at different levels- they link the ideas contained in the text to themselves, to other texts and to the world around them. (Silverii, S. 2006)

Visualization is one strategy that a reader can use to gain literal meaning from a text. Visualizing involves making a mental image of a text which allows the reader to imagine what is happening in the text and to link images and ideas which are occurring in the text. According to Jeffery Wilhelm “creating images and mental models of what one reads is essential to comprehension.”(Cited in Palmer, 2005)

An engaged reader actively uses the strategy of visualization in conjunction with re-reading, reading on and questioning the text. Manning (2002) believes that visualizing is necessary for comprehending any text. This skill can be improved by helping readers concentrate on the pictures that they create in their minds.

A passive reader who does not become involved in the text will find it extremely difficult to be able to visualize images associated with the text. There is evidence that this is a problem for readers who only decode a text because they possess low levels of background knowledge, inattention to punctuation and phrasing and have little personal connections with the text.

(Manning, M. 2002) Furthermore, “For students whose reading comprehension difficulties stem from weakness in visualizing, what fails to come to mind while reading are mental images, or what one sees with the mind’s eye.” (Sanders, M. 2001)

One effective way of visualizing is the R.I.D.E.R method. (Clark, Deshler, Schumaker, Alley and Warner, 1984) This method involves students following a specific five-step method of visualizing an idea contained in a text: **R**ead, **I**mage, **D**escribe, **E**valuate and **R**ead on.

Annandale, Bindon et al (2004) describe the importance of creating images as a process and strategy that efficient readers use, as these images assist students to draw conclusions, make predictions, remember details and assist with overall comprehension.

Visualizing images in a book also allow students to take responsibility for their own thinking processes involved in learning. This is known as **metacognition**. This metacognitive knowledge is vital for a reader who aspires to progress from the beginning stages of reading to being an efficient reader. Visualizing images allows students to make their reading meaningful to them, thus enhancing their own comprehension of a text.

Visualization also assists students to recall detail from an author’s message. The RIDER strategy of visualization is a five-step process which encourages students to imagine in detail part of the story, verbalize their mental image, evaluate this image with a partner and then read on to further gain meaning from the text. The evaluating aspect of RIDER is significant as it encourages

the reader to once again be responsible for their own learning, by comparing their mental image with another person and then adjusting their own image if necessary.

The hypothesis of this study is that **teaching visualization, through the use of the RIDER method to at risk Year 2 students, increases literal comprehension levels.**

Method

Design: This study was conducted using a case study OXO design (observe, treatment, observe.)

Participants: The participants are 15 Year 2 students (8 in the targeted teaching group-TTS and 7 in the control group-CG) who have been identified as being “at risk” readers. Their ages range from 7-8 years. They were selected as a result of their low text levels and their low BURT word reading scores. All of the participants attend a school that is in the Outer North West Zone and is classed as semi-rural. All students except AI come from an English-speaking background. TS from the targeted teaching group has experienced hearing and speech difficulties since birth which has affected her ability to read, decode and comprehend as she does not hear sounds clearly and does not pronounce them correctly. Students CB and MW from the targeted teaching group have previously been discontinued from the Reading Recovery Program and have been deemed “at risk” of not progressing. Students JL, RD and DW have also been discontinued from the Reading Recovery Program and are closely monitored. These students all have difficulty comprehending simple two and three idea sentences.

Materials used: The data collected to direct the selection of students for this research project was undertaken formally and informally. All students in both classrooms were tested to determine their text levels and their individual word recognition abilities. (BURT word test) The selected students were the lowest-achieving students in their classrooms.

These selected students then completed the following measures of assessment:

A TORCH test, Visualization Test (Munro, J.K) and a Self-Efficacy Test. (Munro, J.K)

The following materials were used during the Action Research:

Texts:

The Farmyard Cat in Trouble (Ashton Scholastic)

The Little Red Hen (Addison-Wesley)

Hattie and the Fox (Ashton Scholastic)

Refer to Appendix 1

Fry's Readability Graph:

The Fry Readability Graph was used to determine the suitability of each text. Fictional texts were used to assist the students to improve their literal comprehension.

Refer to Appendix 1

TORCH Test:

The students read Grasshoppers and completed a cloze activity as part of the Pre-test and read Lizards love eggs and completed a cloze activity as part of the Post-test.

Visualization Task:

This test was developed by John Munro and was administered to the students individually at pre and post testing sessions. The passage is read to the student and they retell their mind image in detail. Responses were recorded on a response sheet.

Self-Efficacy Task:

This test was developed by John Munro and was administered individually rather than a small group in order to determine an accurate self-efficacy rating of each student.

RIDER prompt card:

During each teaching session, students were able to see a RIDER prompt poster with detailed cues for each aspect of the RIDER strategy. These were adapted. Students were each given a smaller laminated copy to refer to as they read.

Refer to Appendix 3.

Procedure: The pre-testing for this Action Research involved students being assessed using the TORCH scale (Test of Reading Comprehension) the BURT word test and their text level. The TORCH test (Mossenson, Stephanou, Forster, Masters, McGregor, Anderson and Hill, 2003) involves an assessment of reading comprehension through the reading of a text and then completing a related cloze passage. The students in this Action Research were in Year Two, and completed the TORCH test even though it is designed for students Year 3-10. This factor was taken into consideration by the teacher when scoring the TORCH Test. The TORCH testing was

completed as a small group. The BURT word testing was conducted individually as was the Running Record to determine text level. The Visualization and Self-Efficacy tasks were also completed individually.

The Intervention was conducted as a ‘naturalistic’ study, occurring in an everyday classroom as part of the reading hour in the literacy block. It involved a series of ten consecutive lessons which were completed following a similar format based on John Munro’s visualization tasks. The first lesson involved the teacher explicitly modeling the strategy and lessons 2-10 involved more input from the students. Lessons 2-10 all followed a similar format in order to assist the students in learning the RIDER strategy. Each session lasted approximately 20-25 minutes and was taught as part of a daily literacy block. **Refer to Appendix 2 titled ‘Visualization Lesson Plans.’** The lessons were carried out by the classroom teacher and anecdotal notes were recorded as part of a ‘share time’ experience which is not unfamiliar to the students. This share time allowed students to reflect on their own learning and to verbalize their thoughts. **Refer to Appendix 4 titled ‘Share time results.’** This share time also assists students to increase their metacognitive skills.

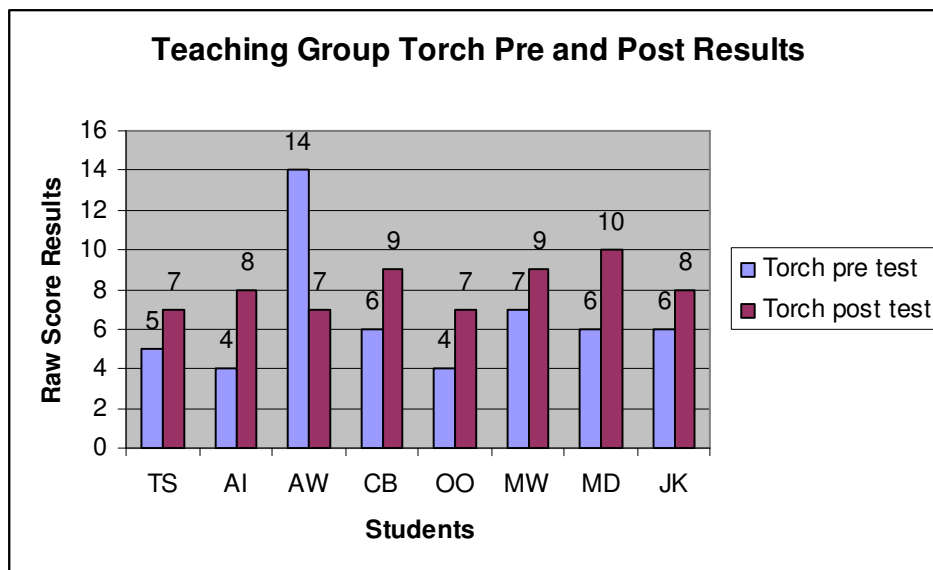
Results

It is the writer's belief that the teaching of Visualization through the RIDER strategy increases the literal comprehension levels of Year Two students.

Refer to the following graphs which support the hypothesis given. The literal comprehension scores of all students in the targeted teaching group increased between the pre and post testing periods.

All students in the targeted teaching group improved in at least one area of testing, whether it is their TORCH results, their Visualization testing or their Self-Efficacy results. The Control Group students all showed improvement as well, however this could be due to them performing at an overall higher level in the pre-testing period.

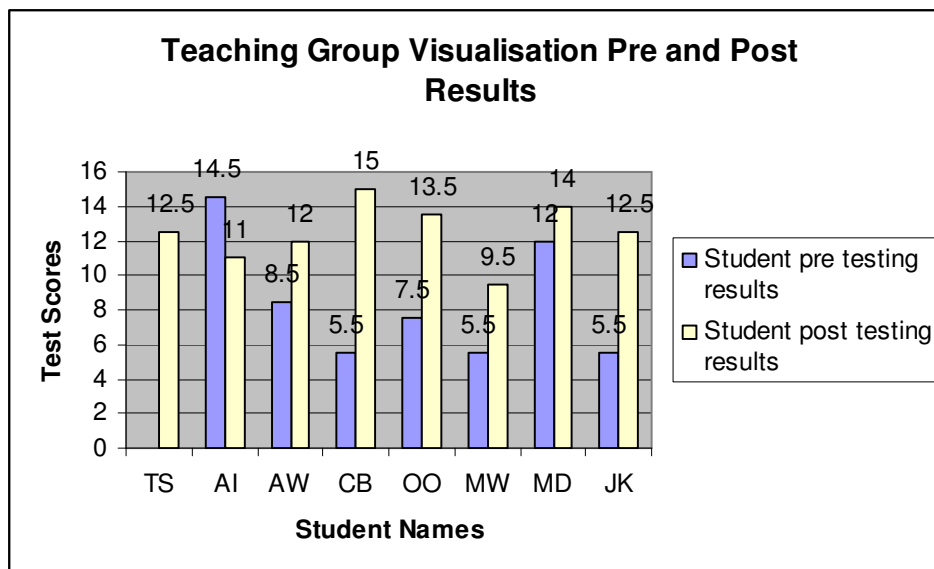
Graph One



The results in Graph One indicate an improvement in the teaching group students. Whilst it may not seem to be a significant improvement with some students only increasing their raw scores by 2 or 3, it should be noted that

these students experience higher levels of difficulty in comprehension than the control group overall. Prior to the pre-testing period, these students had not participated in a TORCH test previously, thus not being experienced at working in a test situation. The targeted teaching group TORCH results could be slightly higher as the pre test TORCH text was non-fiction about grasshoppers and the post test text was called Lizards love eggs and was fiction. All texts used in the teaching lessons were fictional.

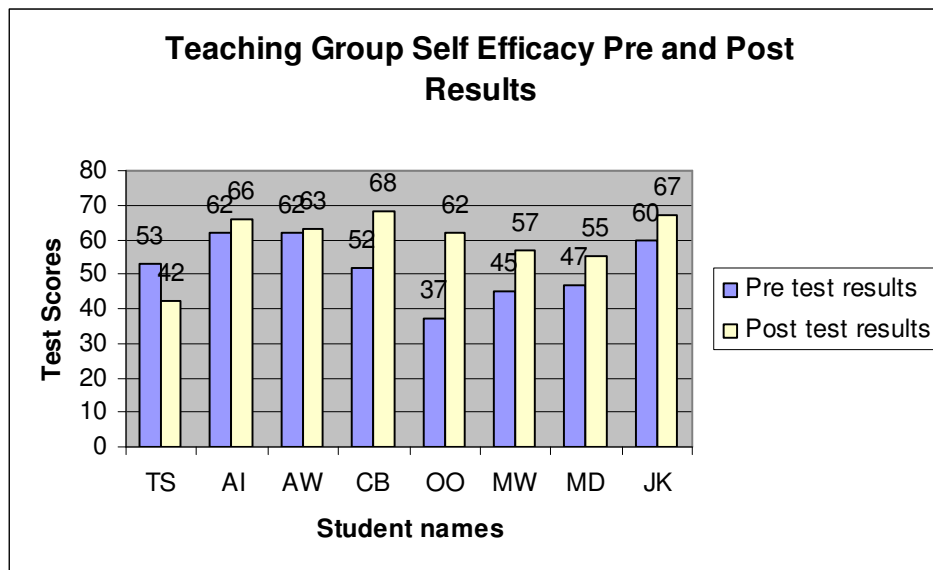
Graph Two:



Graph Two represents the targeted teaching student's achievements or improvements in the Visualization task between the pre and post testing periods. The post testing results for this task are quite significant as it shows that the students had developed an understanding of what visualizing means. At the pre test, students CB, OO and JK were predicting and embellishing their mind image rather than actually visualizing the sentence they were given. At the post test, these same students were more aware of RIDER as a

result of the teaching sessions that occurred between. They learnt about the evaluating aspect of RIDER which is most important in making an accurate mind image. It should also be noted that seven of the eight students (except CB) were absent for at least one of the teaching sessions over the ten days.

Graph Three:



The overall difference in the self-efficacy of the targeted teaching students is most pleasing and perhaps the most significant. Prior to participating in this study, all of these students have been identified as being ‘at risk’ since their entry to school in Prep. Students CB and MW have been discontinued from Reading Recovery. The other students have been withdrawn to participate in the ERIC program and TS and MW have participated in Speech Therapy. All of these students read at levels 9-25 and are not fluent. Their reading is staggered (reading 3-4 words at a time) and they often stumble over minor words. Many of them experience difficulty decoding, let alone understanding the story. It is the writer’s belief that these factors had

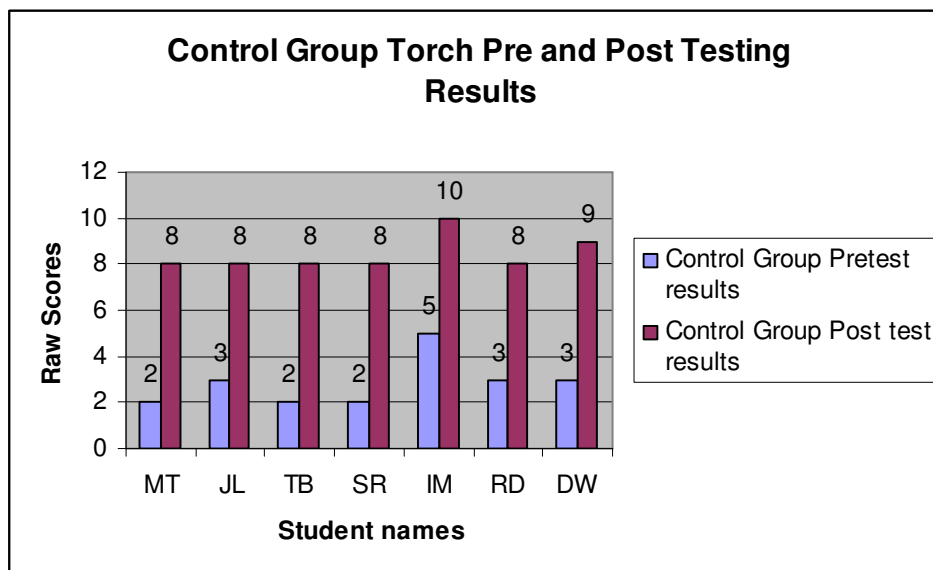
hindered the students from having higher levels of literal comprehension and self-efficacy. All students increased their scores, whether it be by one mark (AW) or by 25 (OO) or by 22 (MW)

Student TS experienced a decrease in self-efficacy scores (pre 53 post 42) which could be due to her not understanding or hearing the questions as she has hearing loss which is exacerbated when she is ill. This student was absent for Sessions One and Seven and is waiting to have another ear operation to fix her ongoing problems.

Some of the results the students had in common were: 'can you make a picture in your head?' or 'when you get to an unknown word would you give up?'

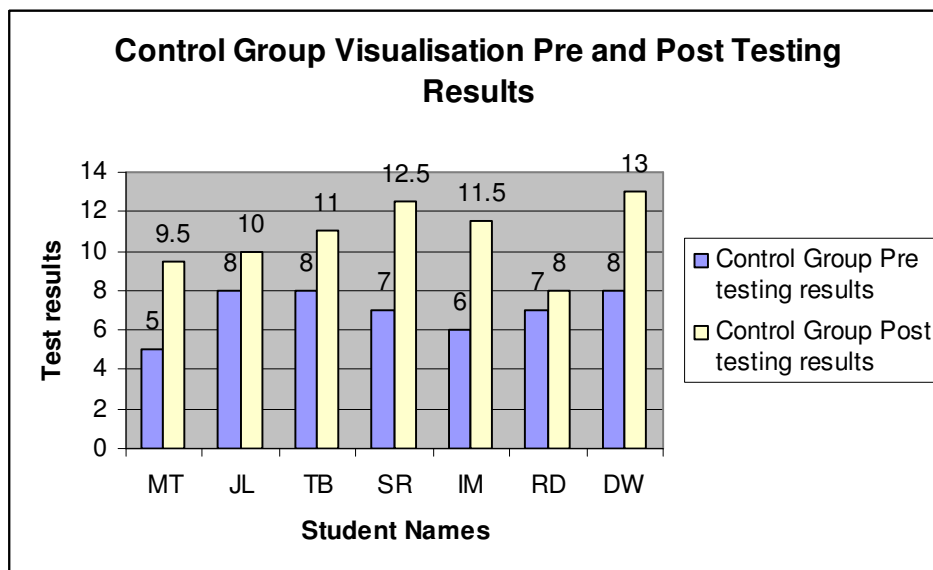
If students have a higher level of self-belief and have an understanding of strategies to use when reading they are more equipped for success when attempting an unknown word or trying to unravel an author's message.

Graph Four:



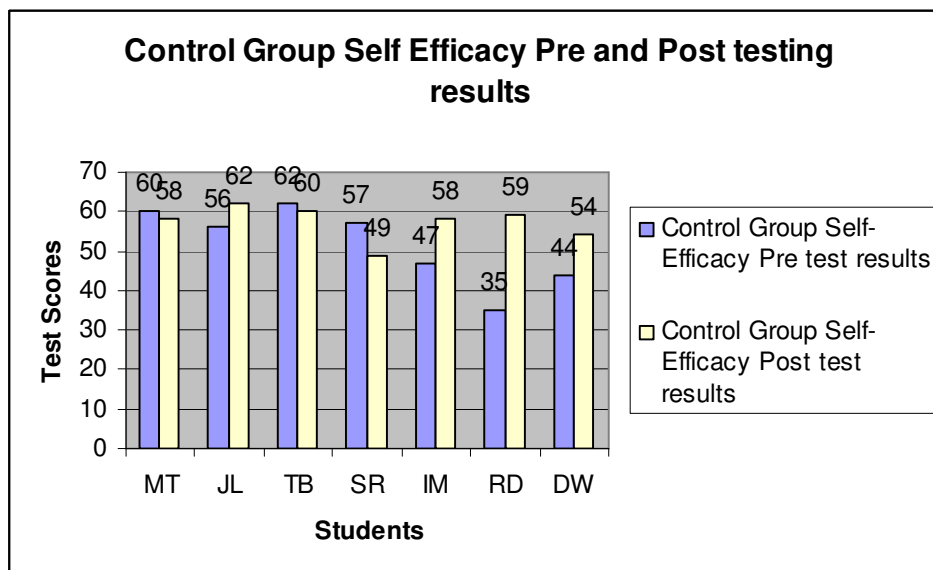
The control group all demonstrated improvement in their pre and post TORCH testing. Once again, these students had not been exposed to a testing situation before such as the TORCH test and all had a reading level of between 10 and 19. Although these levels are similar to the targeted teaching students, they are more fluent readers and do not have any major reading problems, unlike students AI, TS and MW from the targeted teaching group. These students have been referred for further testing.

Graph Five:



The control group all demonstrated improvement in their visualization task. This could be attributed to being more familiar with the testing situation and could also be attributed to the everyday teaching that had occurred in their classroom. Students JL and RD showed only slight improvement which reinforces the belief that these students would greatly benefit from being taught the RIDER strategy in their own classroom. Students SR and IM showed higher levels of improvement and it should be noted that these students were very focused and engaged during the testing. They accurately visualized the sentences that they got correct, rather than some of the other students who predicted or embellished their answers.

Graph Six:



These self-efficacy results generally show higher levels of self-efficacy than the targeted teaching group students. Student MT displays slightly lower levels of self efficacy and it should be noted that this student openly admitted that they were trying to ‘please’ me by saying what they thought they wanted me to hear. At the post-test, this student was reminded about being honest and not to worry about ‘giving the right answers.’ Student SR also shows lower levels of self-efficacy at the post test. This could also be attributed to not being honest, or to being quite distracted in the post testing situation for the self-efficacy test. This student was very focused during the visualization post test. Student RD in the control group showed significantly higher self-efficacy results which could be attributed to some private tutoring that he began receiving in this period.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the teaching of Visualization through the RIDER strategy improves the literal comprehension of Year Two students. Comprehension is a vital life skill for all students which, if learnt at an early stage scaffolds students in their learning for the rest of their life. Visualizing is one skill that has proved to be an asset for at-risk students as it “involves a set of skills and strategies that begin early in life and that continue to become refined and deepened as the years go by.” (Neuman, S. 2007)

Comprehension builds upon prior knowledge and at-risk students need to be provided with meaningful learning opportunities that allow them to become responsible for their own learning and to direct their future learning opportunities.

The RIDER method is a meaningful learning tool that is easy for students to recall and can be used on a daily basis. The RIDER prompt cards assisted students to recall the process and the discussion aspect allowed students to verbalise their thoughts and clarify ideas and misconceptions. (Refer to Appendix 3)

The students in the targeted teaching group applied the strategy in various ways with varying degrees of success. All students showed some degree of improvement in the pre and post testing periods of the study. After the first lesson about RIDER, it was clear that some students were overwhelmed by the actual process. Two students were absent for the first lesson and had to be taught in depth when they returned the next day. The share time results

for this first lesson are very basic and indicate that the students ‘made pictures in their heads’ about the story rather than verbalizing what they actually learnt. The share time results indicate that as they began progressing through the lessons their understanding of RIDER deepened and it became a valuable tool. The students also began using the ‘vocabulary’ of RIDER and became competent at explaining this terminology.

It should also be noted that all students except one were absent for at least one lesson. All students improved between the pre and post testing periods as a result of the targeted teaching lessons. It appears that some students only improved by small increments, but the results are pleasing as they are all students who have shown signs of being ‘at-risk’ of failing to progress. Students JK and CB showed pleasing confidence in their share time responses as they clearly articulated their thoughts at the end of each session. The self-efficacy results for each student are also significant, as it shows that their confidence in their own ability increased.

Prior to the teaching, it was intended that the students would visualize a whole text at each session. However, the students required more detailed instruction at the first lesson and only visualized a few sentences of the book at a time. As they progressed, the students became more confident and competent at visualizing the ideas in the text. This supports the theory that students must be given opportunities to build upon their own experiences at their own rate. “Wilhelm advocates the learning-centred theory in which teachers support students through their zone of proximal development to complete tasks using a gradual release of responsibility.” (Palmer, R. 2005)

The texts used in this study were approximately year-level appropriate, and it would be interesting to note if the results would change if instructional texts were used or if non-fiction texts were used. It would also be interesting to re-test these students later in the year to see if they are still applying the visualization strategy of comprehension, in conjunction with other strategies such as questioning the text, making connections, determining importance and making inferences. (Silverii, S. 2006)

These results show that the teaching of visualization to at-risk students is a valuable teaching tool for all teaching staff. The RIDER strategy can be implemented, or adapted as it is a valuable comprehension strategy for students from Prep onwards. The acronym is easy for students to recall and is a useful visual prompt for these students. It also allows students to develop their oral-language skills as they can verbally describe their mind image or draw this image which helps students access their own schema, through building meaning. (Palmer, R. 2005)

Visualizing for comprehension has varying impacts for education. Visualizing images in a text is something that proficient readers do naturally, and seems to be such a basic concept that teachers could unknowingly 'skip over' as they guide young readers from the decoding stage to being a text user and meaning maker. All teachers, not only from the junior grades need be more aware of the importance of visualization and the implications it has for students who do not apply this strategy or who are unaware of this strategy. Another implication for education is that RIDER was taught to

students in a small group setting. It would be interesting to note if the results would change if it was taught as part of a whole class setting.

In summary, the results of this Action Research Project show that the teaching of visualization, through the RIDER strategy assists students to increase their literal comprehension of a text. It would be beneficial to students and teachers alike, if this strategy was implemented from a young age as the results show that this visualization strategy assisted the targeted teaching students to increase their literal comprehension of the texts used. The RIDER strategy could also be attributed to increasing the self-efficacy of the targeted teaching students. The explicit teaching of Visualization in a small group setting empowered these students to be responsible for their own learning, as it provided them with a strategy that they could use in the future. This is very important as they are in Year Two and will soon begin to work with varying degrees of independence in their schooling. If they continue to utilize the RIDER strategy in all situations when reading, they may move from being beginning/emergent readers to more competent readers.

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Appendix 1:

Texts used in Intervention.

Session	Text Title	Genre	Fry's Readability Level	Series/Publisher	Page number/s
1	The farmyard cat in trouble.	fiction	Year Two	Ashton Scholastic	1-8
2	The farmyard cat in trouble.	fiction	Year Two	Ashton Scholastic	9-14
3	The farmyard cat in trouble.	fiction	Year Two	Ashton Scholastic	15-end of book
4	The Little Red Hen	fiction	Year One	Addison-Wesley	2-7
5	The Little Red Hen	fiction	Year One	Addison-Wesley	8-16
6	No text-review session	fiction	Year One		
7	Hattie and the Fox	fiction	Year One	Mem Fox Ashton Scholastic	2-6
8	Hattie and the Fox	fiction	Year One	Mem Fox Ashton Scholastic	7-12
9	Hattie and the Fox	fiction	Year One	Mem Fox Ashton Scholastic	13-18
10	Hattie and the Fox	fiction	Year One	Mem Fox Ashton Scholastic	19-31

Appendix 2:
Visualisation Action Research Project
Lesson Outlines

Teaching visualization, through the use of the RIDER method to at risk Year 2 student's increases literal comprehension.

Session One:

John Munro's Visualization Strategy

Text:

Introduce the strategy:

Say: We are going to learn something that is going to help you be a better reader. It is called visualization. It means to make a picture in your mind of a story. It will help you understand the story. You can use the word RIDER to help you remember it. Firstly, you read a sentence, and then you imagine the sentence in your head by making a picture. Then I want you to tell another person about the picture in your head. After that, I want you to check that your picture is correct with the other person. If it is, I want you to read on and then do it all again!

Teacher models visualization and cues students.

Say: Let's read the first sentence together. Make a picture in your mind. *Discuss mind image.* Teacher models complete strategy then students practice.

Teacher reviews the intervention method. Say: Let's talk about what we just did. We read a sentence, then we make a picture about it, then we talk about that picture and check that it is correct. If it is we can keep reading on. Is there anyone who doesn't understand?

Students practice.

Say: Let's do it again with the next sentence. Students read the sentence and have a go at visualizing.

Teacher reviews the intervention method.

Say; What do you need to do when you visualize? Discuss.

Students practise again.

Say: Now I want you to do it again but by yourself this time. Read a sentence and make a picture in your mind. Don't forget to talk about your mind picture with a friend. Ask yourself: **Is my mind picture the same as their's? Does it mean the same as what the author has written?** If it is read on.

Student review.

Students verbalise what visualization means, in particular RIDER. Refer to RIDER chart as a cue.

Sessions 2-10

All sessions follow a similar format.

Activity	What does the activity look like?
<i>Previous session review:</i> Teacher reviews visualization and cues RIDER acronym.	What does it mean? Teacher refers to visual cue poster RIDER.
<i>Introduce new text:</i> Give a short text orientation.	Teacher and students read first sentence together. Practise RIDER-discuss any queries/anything they are unsure of.
<i>Students read on.</i>	Students continue reading and stop after each sentence. Discuss with a partner-is my image correct? Do this for 2-3 sentences.
<i>Students clarify misconceptions with Teacher.</i>	Teacher records student's misconceptions. Are there any common ones? If so, teacher stops and revises RIDER again.
<i>Students read on.</i>	Students continue reading and revise RIDER strategy.
<i>Student 'share time.'</i>	Each student verbalizes what they have learnt today in 2 ways: 1. What were the main literal ideas in the text? 2. What does the RIDER acronym mean?

At Lesson 6, students to complete a short self-review of their self-efficacy about the overall strategy of visualization using the RIDER strategy.

Appendix 3:

R Read a part of the story.

I Make a picture in your mind.

D Describe what is in your mind to someone.

E Evaluate-Is your mind image the same as another person?

R Read the next part of the story and do it again!

Appendix 4:
Share Time responses

Session	TS	AI	AW	CB	OO	MW	MD	JK
1	absent	We read about the farm cat. I made a picture in my head.	We practiced reading the big book and then we talked.	The T group did a thing where we made pictures in our heads.	We made pictures and then we talked about them.	Miss Bretag showed us how to read better.	Absent	Absent
2	Very vague. Didn't really understand RIDER. "Close your eyes and think of pictures."	It means make a picture in your head. The farmyard cat was in trouble.	It helps you understand the story more.	RIDER has 5 letters and you learn how to read.	It will help you get the story better in your head.	"if you draw the story you will understand the story."	"Some books are hard to make sense to people."	It has 5 letters to make a picture.
3	Better today. Today I made a picture in my mind.	Today I learnt about RIDER (said reader)	absent	Very confident-today I read the Farmyard cat book.	I have to remember to tell my partner about my picture.	Very confident-today I learnt to remember RIDER.	My mind image was in black and white.	I remember to talk about my picture to someone.
4	We made a picture and then we talked.	Me and my partner had different pictures.	Confidently explained RIDER.	Me and my partner had different pictures.	Explained RIDER except evaluate.	Retold the story and then the pictures.	Away	RIDER is good to help you read.
5	I closed my eyes and told about my picture.	We read a book and then we talked.	Today I learnt more about visualizing.	I have to remember to talk about my mind picture and then see if they are the same.	Today I remembered what the E means in RIDER.	Miss Bretag helped me and my partner understand the big book.	Away	We will get better at reading if we keep doing RIDER.

6	It means make a picture inside your head.	It is called READER (knew what it meant though)	You read then make a picture then tell your partner and talk about it.	It has 5 letters to help you make a picture in your brain.	I made a picture in my head of Alice in Wonderland.	absent	Doesn't really remember from being away.	Spoke very confidently-explained each letter.
7	absent	It helps you read it helps you read the part of the story that you get stuck on.	It helps you read better-there are 5 things that you need to do.	It helps you to make the story in your head. It is what is happening then in the story.	It helps you learn about the book-it helps you to understand.	The R is when you read and then you make a picture in you head.	You have to make a picture in your head.	The last R means read it and do it all again.
8	I talked about making a picture instead of predicting.	absent	I made a picture with my teacher as a partner.	Very confident-explained RIDER	absent	I liked the book-it was easy to make pictures.	The I means make an image which is a picture.	Explained confidently what RIDER means.
9	Kept predicting. I made a picture of the part of the story.	I liked the story and I made a picture in my head.	It helps you get the story in your brain.	My mind image was the same as everyone else's.	My picture and my partner's picture was the same	absent	My picture was mostly the same as my partners.	I visualized the rat stuck in the scary plant.
10	I think I am a good reader now.	I like being in the T group and making pictures.	We can visualize what the author is saying.	The pictures in your head need to be the same as what the writer is saying.	You should make a picture after each sentence.	If you and your partner have a different picture you should try and make them the same.	You have to do RIDER for the sentence you are reading instead of further on.	Visualization means making a picture in your head and then talking about it with someone.

