

Teaching students who have difficulty comprehending written text synonyms and to paraphrase, will assist them to comprehend what they are reading and enable them to successfully retell a given text.

Abstract

Teaching students who have difficulty comprehending written text synonyms and to paraphrase, will assist them to comprehend what they are reading and enable them to successfully retell a given text.

Decoding and comprehension skills are necessary to be classed as a skilled reader. These skills are not automatically acquired with maturity, they are learnt. Research has shown that the teaching of explicit learning strategies enhances the comprehension of readers. It is through the automatization of these learning strategies that the reader develops confidence, understanding and a greater self efficacy of their learning.

This action research was based on the OXO model whereby testing is administered pre and post to the intervention program. The program involved six students from Year 4, three students, all boys, were in the experiment group and the control group consisted of two girls and one boy. All six students were fairly skilled at decoding however their comprehension skills are rather delayed hence why they were chosen to participate. Over the ten intervention sessions, the students were taught to supply synonyms for single words, a single word in the context of a sentence, how to paraphrase, paraphrasing of an individual sentence, paraphrasing of a paragraph, verbalization of the paraphrasing strategy and the identification of the main idea in a paragraph.

The findings of the project supported my hypothesis in that all the students in the experiment group displayed a marked improvement in all four tests administered. One of the students in the experiment group and two in the control group referred to prior knowledge when working with non-fiction text which helps to explain why there was improvement in the post PROBE test for two students in the control group. All three students have automatized the strategy as they were verbalizing the strategy without prompting during the post paraphrasing test.

The implications for the teaching of comprehension are that the strategies need to be explicitly taught so they become automatic and the students develop self efficacy for their learning. Although this project was conducted with students with learning difficulties it highlighted the benefits for any student especially those who are below their age appropriate reading level. As the students develop more confidence and understanding they are reinforcing the scaffolding of their literacy learning.

Introduction

Broad Topic Targeted

Within the first few years of schooling, students develop the ability to read which as defined by the Heinemann Australian Dictionary 1978 is “to look at, understand or say aloud written words” and we as educators refer to as attaining an acceptable level of decoding skills. Conversely, their comprehension skills defined as “the act of power of understanding” Heinemann Australian Dictionary 1978 is significantly lower than their actual reading age which impacts considerably on their overall learning.

True, decoding is the first stage in learning to read, however as students approach the middle years of schooling, comprehending the written word and the information contained in the text becomes vital to their learning. Reading with understanding involves the smooth co-ordination of higher order cognitive processes (thinking, reasoning, analysing, connecting, reflecting) and lower order of processes (word recognition, decoding) Westwood 2001. Not all students develop these skills at the same stage of development nor are they automatically attained and explicit instruction or intervention is often required. Parker, Hasbrouck and Denton identified students who experience failure in reading as those who do not understand key words or sentences, cannot discern how sentences link to each other or how the information in a text fits together in a meaningful way. Without applying these strategies a student’s concentration and motivation to read is lost.

Related Research

Reading comprehension must be an active process “...reading is an active involvement with the text which results in comprehension” (Gee. H.1998). Students must be aware of the various reading strategies at their disposal to assist them with comprehension. We cannot however assume that comprehension comes with maturity or automatically hence the majority of students will need explicit teaching of various comprehension strategies. Not all readers “acquire strategies automatically and need explicit instructions (Gee. H. 1998). Teaching learning strategies enables them to approach a task and complete it efficiently and effectively therefore increasing their performance. These strategies can be employed in a number of settings – academic and non academic (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992)

Traditional instruction, lecture methods and ‘skill & drill’ approach do not promote learning for students considered at risk or those with learning disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 1990: McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager & Lee 1993). It is through cognitive strategy training that emphasis is placed on changing the way in which students process information. This approach deals with the thinking process and what the student actually does to direct their performance and self -assessment of the task (Deshler, S. Schumaker, 1986).

If reading is the act of searching for and understanding the meaning of the written word (Sorrell 1996), then teaching students to paraphrase and then verbalise is one vital strategy that will assist poor readers to comprehend. There are several strategies that aid

students in comprehending a text. Each strategy is made up of a number of parts and to help students remember, a mnemonic is useful. In the Paraphrasing Strategy (Schmaker, Denton & Deshler, 1984) the acronym RAP was devised,

Read a paragraph

Ask yourself, what were the main ideas and details in the paragraph

Put the main idea and details into your own words.

The effectiveness of teaching paraphrasing and the verbalizing as a strategy to enhance comprehension enables the child to self monitor, become an active listener and attain meaning (Hellekson, L. and Feilter, F. 1994).

While the teaching of strategies is vital to students learning so to is their ability to automatis the rituals of these taught strategies. This is made possible by getting the students to articulate what they will do whilst reading (paraphrase) and why this is important (to understand what is being read). There needs to be more emphasis placed on talk so that students can clarify for themselves their understandings. As many students have a limited vocabulary it is therefore necessary to build a network of vocabulary through the teaching of synonyms to assist the students with paraphrasing in order to scaffold their comprehension.

The Paraphrase strategy has proved to raise the reading comprehension level of students with or without learning problems (Schumaker, Denton & Deshler, 1984). While (Ellis and Graves, 1990) also found it beneficial in improving the reading comprehension skills of middle school students with learning difficulties.

Links between the literature and the problem

The students in the control group cope quite well with decoding and have scored fairly well in their oral reading accuracy test. Where errors have been made when reading the text, they have made some self-corrections however at other times they have continued to read on either leaving a word out or substituting a word which was not a synonym causing the meaning of the text to be either distorted or lost. Low scores in their oral reading comprehension and retell of text read displayed that the understanding of the text was poor before the intervention sessions were undertaken.

The objective of this investigation is to apply the research theory that by directing students to find synonyms for singular words to substitute given words in a sentence, so that the meaning is not altered, will assist them to comprehend the given text. After modeling by the teacher, students discussing as a group and individually mastering this strategy, the students will automatise the rituals of the strategy in order to scaffold their comprehension.

Prediction

Teaching students who have difficulty comprehending written text synonyms and to paraphrase, will assist them to comprehend what they are reading and enable them to successfully retell a given text.
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Method

Design

The design is a case study OXO design in which the gain in reading comprehension accuracy following the explicit teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing is monitored for Year 4 students who have fairly accurate decoding skills but poor comprehension of meaning. Prior to the ten intervention sessions, six students were assessed using PROBE, to determine their reading age, reading accuracy, oral reading comprehension and retell accuracy. John Munro's Synonym Task was also administered along with a Paraphrase task. The students were then divided into two groups of three – a control group with no intervention and an experimental group who were taught synonyms and paraphrasing. This involved the articulation of what students were doing during reading and how this strategy would assist them with their comprehension and retell. At the completion of the intervention, both groups were given post assessments that were based on the pre-tests administered. The results were then compared and conclusions were derived.

Participants

My role within the school is administrative with time allocation as literacy support for Year 4. The students I am working with have been referred to the Catholic Education School Advisors with learning difficulties either, educational, psychological or speech. I meet with these students three mornings a week for one hour. These students also have support two afternoons a week within their integrated units of work. The participants in this research, four boys and two girls, are all from this group of students. They are decoding fairly well for their reading age however they have difficulty comprehending written text which is particularly evident in their capability of retelling a written text in their own words.

The sessions for this study are to be conducted in our regular literacy support sessions over a time frame of four weeks. Each session is to be approximately 30 minutes in duration.

Student A is 9 years of age and is the eldest of four children. While at preschool he was referred for speech pathology and cognitive assessment through the local Community Health Inc. These reports were then forwarded on to the school on his enrolment and the assessments were followed through and reviewed by the Catholic Education Office. He still remains on the Speech Pathology caseload. Regular P.S.G. meetings are held with his parents, classroom teacher and the speech pathologist. His parents have been instructed on several programs by the speech pathologist and they work through these with Student A at home. His most recent assessment states, he is within the average range for both receptive oral and expressive oral language. The findings suggest that he may experience difficulty with both oral and written language that involves, remembering more than two instructions at a time, producing longer sentences with appropriate syntax, formulating stories which have an adequate amount of information and appropriate sequencing of ideas, identifying and correcting syntactic errors both orally and in written work. The following articulation errors were also noted, /l/ - /y/ e.g. lion - yion, /s/ - /th/,

/r/ - /w/ e.g. rabbit - wabbit, /th/ - /f/ e.g. thumb – fumb and /th/ - /d/ e.g. feather – feda. His reading age is within the range of 7.5 to 8.5years.

Student B is 9 years of age and has an older sister in Year 9 at a Catholic Secondary school in the area. He was referred to the Curriculum Adviser (Special Education) when he was in Year 2. His parents were concerned with his academic progress and were seeking information on his learning strengths and weaknesses. His classroom teacher felt that he was progressing fairly well academically however there were some concerns with his spelling and ability to construct sentences. The teaching recommendations from the assessment indicated the Student B would continue to benefit from oral language activities that promote understanding of a situation and then to written expressive language. Activities such as re-telling stories, recounting events with assistance to write these understandings will be of great benefit to his development. To improve his comprehension and expressive language ability, he needs encouragement and instruction in paraphrasing, re-reading and asking questions about the ideas being presented. After reading several paragraphs or pages of a book he needs to be asked what he remembers of the story. His reading age is within the range of 7 – 8 years.

Student C is 9 years of age and has an older sister. Although Hindi is the main language spoken at home, Student C always responds in English. In year 1, he was referred for an Educational, Psychological and Speech pathology assessment as there were concerns relating to his learning as he had difficulty remaining on task, inability to follow instructions, easily distracted from task or activity along with engaging in behaviours that distracted his peers from their learning. The result of this extensive assessment was the diagnosis of Severe Learning Disorder. In 2005 as a result of a review from the School Nursing Program, Student C was referred to the Catholic Education Office once again for a full speech pathology assessment as they felt he had reduced Short Term Auditory Memory. The results of this assessment placed his Receptive Oral Language in the average range however his Expressive Oral language was in the significantly below average range. Within the classroom, the implications are that he experiences difficulty with, comprehending and retaining information not supported with visual clues, following instructions, learning new topics that involve the introduction of new vocabulary, producing longer sentences with appropriate syntax and being able to effectively use prior knowledge to assist learning new information. At present his reading age is in the range of 8 – 9 years. Currently he is also working with a tutor for one hour one night a week.

Student D has just turned 10 years of age and is the eldest of 5 children, with the three older children being at school. At three years of age Student D was diagnosed with Global Delay and after arriving in Term 3 of her prep year she was referred for possible Autism Spectrum Disorder which was subsequently confirmed. Within the classroom she has difficulty following instructions and completing tasks independently. All instructions need to be modified and reinforced before she can follow any task and she often requires a one to one approach. A structured routine is preferred as she doesn't cope well with changes in the normal classroom routine. Within the classroom she has an Individualised Program that includes working with intergration aids three days a week for mathematics,

social skills and the integrated unit. Regular P.S.G. meetings are held and her program and progress are under constant review. Currently her reading age is 7 – 8 years. Her ability to decode and comprehend written text can often be dependent on her willingness to cooperate or her interest in the subject matter.

Student E is 9 years old and has an older sister in Year 8 at a Catholic Secondary school in the area and a younger sister who is to start school in 2007. In year 1 Student E was referred to the Catholic Education Office for an Educational, Psychological and Speech assessment with the results indicating that she has Severe Language Disorder which indicates that her capacity to understand her learning through language is limited. She experiences great difficulty interpreting and applying meaning through information presented to her verbally so will rely heavily on her visual capabilities. Therefore it is through oral language activities such as retelling stories, recounting events and then being assisted to put these spoken words into writing that will assist her greatly. Emphasis need to be placed on her internalizing the skills taught so they become automatic as she reads and listens to text. Besides the literacy support group, Student E works with intergration aids in the homework support group and one afternoon a week for her integrated unit work. She has at different stages worked with a tutor however financial difficulties have limited this availability.

Student F is 10 years of age and the eldest of two children, his younger sister is in Year 1. In March 2004 Student F was diagnosed with Nephrotic Syndrome which is a fairly common disease in children involving the kidneys. He is on daily medication, frequent urine samples and all precautions must be taken to avoid infection as relapses are common and there is no curative treatment available. Also in mid 2004 he was also referred to the Catholic Education office for Educational, Psychological and Speech assessment which resulted in a diagnosis of Severe Language Disorder. As both his receptive oral language and expressive oral language is significantly below average, Student F has difficulty understanding complex sentences, following instructions, recalling sentences with increased grammatical complexity and comprehending information. He does have a strength in 'processing speed' which indicates that he can perform simple tasks that require following a specific rule or model which is clearly demonstrated for him. He does work with a tutor at home one night a week.

Materials

Each student was assessed individually with the following tests.

- Probe Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension – both fiction and non-fiction text at the relevant Reading Age level. There are no pictures and limited title clues accompanying the text which ensures that the results are based on the comprehension skills.
- Retell of Probe Text – both fiction and non-fiction. At the completion of the comprehension assessment the students then completed a retell of the read text in their own words. This was recorded for analysis of synonyms used, paraphrasing skills and accuracy of recalling events in text.

- Synonym Task by John Munro – the students are given a word and then asked if they know another word/words that have the same meaning as the word given. The student's response is then recorded.
- Paraphrase Task using - Sentence Memory for Sentence Task by John Munro – The presentation of this task was altered slightly to that intended by John Munro. For the purpose of this research, the students were given the sentence and asked to retell it in their own words. It was stressed that the meaning of the sentence was to remain the same. Sentences 1 to 21 were used for the Pre Test stage of the research.
- Paraphrase Task using - Record Of Oral Language – Alternative Levelled Sentences (author unknown – forwarded by Brenda Dalheim) was used in the Post Test for the same purpose as the Sentence Memory for Sentence Task. The 21 sentences used were taken from Level 1-Part 2, Level 2-Part 2 and Level 3-Part 2.

Procedure

Each student was individually pre-tested using the materials outlined above. This was done in the week before the intervention sessions commenced.

The initial focus of the intervention sessions was substituting words for synonyms. This was then used as the framework for paraphrasing sentences then moving onto paragraphs. The first two sessions focused on what a synonym is and creating vocabulary lists which were used in various games to increase the students spontaneity in 'giving a synonym for' and also assisted in have creating word banks for the sentence work. Sessions three to ten used these word banks to assist with paraphrasing sentences and eventually whole paragraphs. At every stage in the intervention sessions the students were encouraged to verbalise the strategy they were practicing before they read. "A synonym is another word that has the same meaning." To paraphrase I –"Read the sentence, think about what it says, cover the sentence and then say it in my own words."

At the conclusion of the ten intervention sessions the students were again individually assessed using the same materials listed for the pre-testing. This took place the week after the final intervention session.

The ten intervention sessions were held over a four week period. The aim was for three sessions a week but this didn't always eventuate due to timetable restraints. Besides encouraging the students to verbalise the strategies they also took notes and recorded their responses in their english work books.

Session 1:- Think of a synonym for a given word. Create a word bank. Play word games using the synonyms, Bingo, Concentration, Fish.

Session 2:- Revise the definition of a synonym, play the games created in the previous session. Move onto the introduction of using synonyms in sentence work. A sentence is written on the board and the verb is underlined. A list is then compiled on the board of

synonyms for that verb, words that have the same meaning. The teacher models the retell of the sentence using the selected words from the list ensuring that the meaning of the sentence remains. Each student has a turn.

Session 3:- Recall what happened in the previous session, replacing the verb with a synonym. Using the same sentence the students are asked to retell the sentence changing as many words as possible. These sentences are transcribed on the board. Discussion takes place as to which sentences have retained the meaning of the original sentence. The students then record their sentence.

Session 4:- Introduce a new sentence. Ask the students what picture they see after reading that sentence. Transcribe their responses on the board. The teacher models the retelling of the sentence using as many synonyms as possible. Students retell and write their own sentences. Discussion on what we do when reading. Introduce the verbalization of what we do when we read, read the sentence, picture it, cover the sentence and retell it in my own words. Repeat the process using a second sentence.

Session 5:- Using a fictional text and verbalizing the strategy before reading, the students read a sentence, picture it, cover the sentence and retell it in their own words changing as many words as possible.

Session 6, 7, 8, 9:- Reading both fictional and non-fictional texts and verbalising the strategy before reading, the students read the text a sentence at a time and paraphrase it. At the end of each paragraph discuss what the main idea is.

Session 10:- A shared wall story. A short story was read to the group. Working individually, the students were given several sequential paragraphs to read. Their task was then to use the paraphrasing strategy to create an illustrated wall story to be shared at the completion of the session. Before commencing to read they verbalised the strategy and this was repeated at the beginning of each new paragraph. Before sharing the completed wall story the main ideas of the story were discussed. The story was read and the students evaluated their work focusing on whether the initial meaning was retained.

Results

Table 1: Pre and Post test results using PROBE

STUDENT	AGE		READING AGE	READING ACCURACY		READING COMPREHENSION	
	Pre	Post		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	9.5	9.6	7.5 – 8.5yrs	95.6%	97.8%	75%	87.5%
B	9.1	9.2	7 – 8yrs	97%	100%	50%	75%
C	9.6	9.7	8 – 9yrs	98%	98.6%	37.5%	50%
D	9.11	10.0	7 – 8yrs	99%	100%	50%	50%
E	9.9	9.10	7 – 8yrs	99%	99%	50%	65%
F	10.0	10.1	7.5 – 8.5yrs	96.8%	97%	37.5%	45.5%

The PROBE test identifies and defines the six components of comprehension – literal, reorganisation, inference, vocabulary, evaluation and reaction. These components illustrate an overall picture of the students understanding of the text. For the purpose of this research both the fiction and non-fiction text for the specific reading ages were used. The fiction text was used for the pre test and the non-fiction for the post test.

As was stated in the descriptions of each student participating in the research, they are all quite competent at decoding, however they struggle with the comprehension of the text. This was consistent for both the fiction and non-fiction texts. As all six students are displaying similar struggles it was difficult deciding who would participate in the intervention sessions and who would be part of the control group. In the end the criteria for selection was based on school attendance as the students needed to be withdrawn from their class group to participate, therefore they needed to be at school regularly for the sessions to take place.

From the figures in Table 1, it is noted that all the students in the intervention group, A, B and C improved favourably in their comprehension. Throughout the intervention sessions both fiction and non-fiction texts were used. Students E and F in the control group also displayed considerable improvement. However, it should be noted that Student E kept stating that she really liked reading and talking about crocodiles because they are very unusual animals and they have such big mouths and very strong teeth. Student F used his prior knowledge in his text on ‘Long Ago’ as last term his integrated unit was centred on Australian History with some emphasis being on our Indigenous race, the Aborigines. Student D was very reluctant to participate at all and needed a great deal of encouragement to complete the task, especially the post testing.

Table 2: Retell of PROBE text in own words. (Pre and Post testing results)

STUDENT	AGE		READING AGE	MAIN POINTS CONTAINED IN TEXT		MAIN POINTS INCLUDE IN RETELL OF TEXT	
	Pre	Post		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
A	9.5	9.6	7.5 – 8.5yrs	10	11	6	9
B	9.1	9.2	7 – 8yrs	10	11	5	10
C	9.6	9.7	8 – 9yrs	14	15	7	9
D	9.11	10.0	7 – 8yrs	10	11	6	5
E	9.9	9.10	7 – 8yrs	10	11	6	5
F	10.0	10.1	7.5 – 8.5yrs	10	11	4	3

The purpose behind the Retell assessment was to evaluate how main points the students retained from their initial reading of the text and how they orally presented it. In order to complete this task, the students had the written text in front of them.

In the pre testing it was evident that all the students commenced by recounting the initial sentence word for word as it appeared in the text. They then stated a couple of points from the text and these weren't always in sequential order, it was more as they remembered it. Students B and E used their finger to scan over the text while Student A went into story telling mode and included his own elaboration on the text. Student D also went into elaborate story telling mode as she spoke with tremendous expression which climaxed with the explosive 'BANG' when the tree crashed down across the driveway.

From Table 2 it is very evident that the intervention group definitely progressed as a result of the research program. What was most rewarding was they each verbalised the strategy before attempting the retell. Student B was covering the text, rehearsing quietly to himself each sentence before retelling the events. Student A closed his eyes before commencing and then covered sections of the text as he worked his way through. He was actually inverting sentences and very expressive in the process. Student C was a little more reserved in his post test even though he successfully used the paraphrasing strategy. He was constantly looking at me for reassurance that he was doing it correctly. As was expected the control group relied heavily on memory to retell the text and their results were consistent with the pre testing results.

Table 3: Pre and Post Test Results for Synonym Task.

STUDENT	KNOWN SYNONYMS PRE TEST	KNOWN SYNONYMS POST TEST
A	11 / 29 words	21 / 29 words
B	9 / 29 words	19 / 29 words
C	10 / 29 words	19 / 29 words
D	10 / 29 words	9 / 29 words
E	6 / 29 words	8 / 29 words
F	13 / 29 words	12 / 29 words

This test was conducted to evaluate the students understanding of what a synonym is and being able to recall a word that has the same meaning as another word.

It was very evident in the Pre testing that the students really struggled with this task. Numerous times throughout the test they responded with ‘I’m not sure’ or ‘I don’t know’. All six students used the statement ‘I don’t know what that word means’ for fatigued and adolescent. Student C was the only child to draw on prior knowledge to assist him with a couple of the words. For ‘ancient’ he said, ‘I learned one of them, is it ancient? Someone said it once.’ Similar for ‘sick’ he said, ‘In this movie they said that he was ill.’ Then for ‘release’ he said, ‘take off, free, like you can release a lion, free it.’

For the experiment group, the results improved considerably after the intervention sessions. In many instances the students were giving more than one synonym for several of the words listed. However for the purpose of this task I only counted one successful synonym for each word listed. As the figures in Table 3 illustrate, the experiment group virtually doubled their score from the Pre Test.

Table 4: Paraphrase Task – Pre and Post Testing results

STUDENTS	PRE TEST – SENTENCE MEMORY FOR SENTENCE TASK	POST TEST- RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE
A	9 / 21 sentences	16 / 21 sentences
B	7 / 21 sentences	17 / 21 sentences
C	5 / 21 sentences	15 / 21 sentences
D	5 / 21 sentences	6 / 21 sentences
E	7 / 21 sentences	8 / 21 sentences
F	6 / 21 sentences	5 / 21 sentences

The Paraphrasing task focused on determining the individual students ability to retell sentences in their own words. It required them to listen to the text sentence, comprehend it and then retell it using their own words which again highlighted their ability to use synonyms.

In the Pre Testing, this proved to be the most difficult task. Student A consistently changed the action verb in most sentences and added his own phrases that weren't evident in the initial sentence. Student B also changed action verbs as well as several adjectives that altered the meaning of the initial sentence considerably. Student C either, added phrases of his own or omitted phrases from the text sentences. He also used antonyms instead of synonyms in his attempts to paraphrase. Students D and E, changed the gender of subject in the text sentences on numerous occasions as well as changing the action verb. Student F consistently substituted personal nouns for the pronouns and similar to Student C, used antonyms instead of synonyms.

At the completion of the intervention sessions there was a marked improvement in the experiment group. They were verbalizing the paraphrasing strategy learnt and in the case of Student A and to a slightly lesser extent, Student B, they were inverting the sentence order as well as replacing several words in each sentence with synonyms.

Learning trends of each student.

The three students who participated in the Intervention sessions were extremely enthusiastic. They were constantly asking their classroom teachers if they were having a lesson and once in the group it took some reminding of how we answer as they were often talking over each other or arguing as to whose turn it was. It took until Session 7 for Students A and B to verbalise the paraphrasing strategy without looking at the notes displayed in the room or myself for prompting. Student C didn't achieve this until Session 8. Once they had this established they used it constantly. Student A told me that it made it really easy for him to retell after he 'created the picture in his head' because he could see what he had to talk about. His only down fall was that he had to be reminded to stay focused on the actual text as he had a tendency to creatively enhance the original text.

Student C took some time to settle into the group sessions as he didn't volunteer information readily however once he started to achieve some success, his confidence improved and he displayed a greater willingness to participate in the later sessions of the intervention. It is interesting to note that his classroom teacher approached me and stated that his reading had improved considerably since his initial testing at the beginning of the year.

All three students made considerable progress in all the post assessments and participated consistently in the oral discussions. As all the students involved in the research are intergrated, I found that all our sessions ran over the time planned as they needed time and considerable practice to understand, utilise and internalise the process involved in paraphrasing.

From the test results presented and my observation, this paraphrasing strategy has provided the students with a tool to assist them in their understanding of written text, which then impacts positively on the confidence with reading.

Discussion

From the onset, the focus of this action research was for the students to increase their level of comprehension of written text by explicitly teaching them synonyms and the paraphrasing strategy. By comparing the students pre and post testing results and making comparisons with the control group, who did not part take in the intervention sessions, the benefits of the research were assessed. The results presented in Tables 1 to 4 were extremely positive as they clearly outlined for these selected students that the teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing strategy did enhanced their comprehension of written text and enabled them to successfully retell both fiction and non-fiction text.

All the students chosen for the project are either on intergration funding or been referred to the Catholic Education Department for assessment in specific categories of learning. They are all in Year 4 and were withdrawn from their classroom to work with the researcher. As none of the students had worked with the researcher before a relationship had to be developed and this proved difficult for a couple of the students. The children in the control group were individually removed from their class for both the pre and post testing. They had little time to establish a sound working relationship an often stated that they were missing out and wanted to know why they couldn't work with the rest of the group. While the experiment group was also tested individually, they had 10 sessions to work together as a group, supporting each other in their learning while also developing trust and a positive rapport with the researcher. This relationship, trust and modeling within the group had an impact on the results as the confidence and self efficacy of the group improved significantly.

Dashler, S. Schumaker, 1986 eluded to the fact that it is through cognitive strategy training that emphasis is placed on changing the way in which students process information. This was no more evident than in the comments made by Student A when discussing with the group what he does when paraphrasing. Besides listing the steps he follows, read the sentence, picture it in your mind, cover it, retell it in your own words, he kept telling the other two students that picturing it really helped because he had something to look at and that made it easier to talk about it. The constant talking through the strategy actually help to tune them in to the task although it did take most of them until Session 8 to confidently use the strategy without prompting.

It was essential that the teaching of synonyms was the focus of the first two intervention sessions. As the students have a limited vocabulary, it is therefore necessary to build a network of vocabulary through the teaching of synonyms so that they don't revert back to the 'authors words' when attempting to retell the written text. Initially the students found it relatively easy to find a synonym for several isolated words that enabled them to experience success in the word games played. It was when we moved into finding synonyms for words in sentences that they experienced some frustration as they often found that the meaning of the original sentence changed if particular synonyms were used. This was evident in Session 3, particularly for Student C when working with the sentence – 'Stephen and Russell went along the beach.' He insisted that 'sea' was a

synonym for 'beach'. It wasn't until Student B stated that, 'the boys couldn't walk along the sea because that would mean walking on the water and we all know that nobody can do that. Through a few more examples, similar to this, the students started to identify that the context of the sentence does impact to a certain degree on the synonyms chosen as the whole purpose of using synonyms to paraphrase is to retain the meaning of the written text.

Moving into working with fiction and non-fiction text was the next challenge for the students. All of a sudden the language wasn't as familiar to them and the passages of text were longer. It was a slow process getting them to recall and apply the paraphrasing strategy that they had been successfully using on random sentences. It took them until part way through Session 7 to feel comfortable with fiction and non-fiction texts. All three students appeared to have more success with non-fiction text. Whether this relates to being able to utilize prior knowledge or the content in this text type is more factual becomes an area for further exploration and possible research. The continual modeling and practice of working sentence by sentence from the text, along with retaining the meaning was really automatised by Session 9. This was clearly illustrated by Student A when he actually changed the structure of the sentence from a fictional text and retained the meaning.

There needs to be more emphasis placed on talk so that students can clarify for themselves their understandings. This is just as important as the teaching of the strategies. This self-efficacy gives the students confidence and the ability to clarify for themselves their understandings and it is essential in order to scaffold their comprehension. At the beginning of each session the students revised what had been covered in the previous session, including a retell of the text read. Initially they had difficulty retaining to meaning in their retell, however by Session 9, Student C, the most reluctant participant in the group, successfully recounted a short non-fiction text on Butterflies to the group. This text had been the focus of the previous session and worked on by the whole group. His retell maintained the meaning of the original text and all main points were included. The smile on his face was priceless and his confidence was given a tremendous boost.

As the sessions progressed it was evident that the students' oral comprehension levels increased and this was supported in the post PROBE testing. Even though two of the students in the control group showed slight improvement in the post testing, the advancement made by the intervention group was more pronounced. As stated earlier, the fact that a factual text was the basis of that particular test may have allowed for the students in the control group to draw upon prior knowledge. The activity completed in the 10th and final session also illustrated the overall improvement in their comprehension skills. They were working on a fiction text titled 'The Lonely Giant'. After reading the text together as a group, each student was given a section of the book to illustrate, paraphrase and display in sequence around the wall of the room, thus creating a Wall Story. The completed story had all the main points include in the correct sequential order and the meaning of the whole story was retained throughout the text. This displayed that they were not only able to orally retell the story but were starting to transfer the

paraphrasing strategy, retelling skill and self-confidence from an oral presentations to written text.

Ellis and Graves 1990 found the paraphrasing strategy beneficial in improving the reading comprehension skills of middle school students with learning difficulties. This individual research supports their findings. Further investigation could then be focused on whether teaching the same strategy to younger students not experiencing learning difficulties would equivalent results.

Implications for teaching practice

- Display cue cards/charts around the room as prompts for comprehending any written text.
- Teach and continually revise the paraphrasing strategy and continually encourage students to use it when reading to gain information from any text.
- This strategy is an excellent for runner to the note taking for any research, especially when the students need to work on projects.
- Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies.
- Administer varied assessment tasks to monitor and evaluate each students ongoing progress in paraphrasing and comprehension of any written text
- Continually encourage the verbalization of strategies to automatise the strategies and develop the self-efficacy of each student.

Directions for future research

- Conduct a similar explicit teaching unit with younger students who aren't experiencing learning difficulties.
- Explore the impact that prior knowledge has on the paraphrasing and comprehension of non-fiction texts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Synonyms Task

- Students are given a word
- Asked, 'Do you know another word that means the same as
- Responses are recorded.
- Students complete a practice exercise first.
- Target words are :- small, fast, old, leave, car, shoe, child, fat, walk, cat, fatigued, boat, clean, sick, tiger, engine, ignore, precious, angry, hit, give, stop, cage, adolescent, station, release, flow, liberate, a building.

Total – 29 words

Appendix 2: Paraphrasing Tasks

Pre Test :- Sentence memory for Sentences Task, John Munro.

- Each sentence is read to the student.
- Student is asked to 'Retell the sentence in your own words.'
'Make sure the sentence meaning is retained.'
- Students' response is recorded.
- Sentences are :- They eat pumpkin
The rabbit did not run
They ate the fresh bread from the bakers' shop after they bought the paper.
In the bus he could see his friend.
The woman watched the basketball match and the girl ate a pie.
The family used their red beach umbrella to avoid the intense sunlight.
The lizard drank the water, the rabbit scratched itself and the boy blew bubbles.
Heavy fog caused several accidents on the highway.
If David walks around the lake he will see the three pink ducks.
The puppies in the box are warm.
It took the younger boys more than ten minutes to eat the apple pie.
In the autumn they often enjoy long bike rides through the park.
She was there with the boats on the river and the dog was under the tree.
Late every afternoon Jack wanted to swim with Ann at the beach.

They were excited about the photos and waited at the corner.
When Jill kicks the ball she drops it quickly onto her left foot.
Before they went into the shop the car tooted its horn loudly.
As it was cold they decided to move to the other room
upstairs.
The class was told to do examples 4 to 7 on page 14 of their
word book.
Jean will paint her doll's house red if she can find yellow
flowers.
Reading is fun as long as the story is interesting and has at
least three pictures in each chapter.

Total - 21 sentences.

Post Test:- Record of Oral language – Alternative Levelled Sentences

(Sentences taken from: Level 1 Part 2, Level 2 Part 2, Level 3 Part 2)

- Each sentence is read to the student.
- Student is asked to 'Retell the sentence in their own words.'
'Make sure the sentence meaning is retained.'
- Students' response is recorded.
- Sentences are:- My brother's television is noisy.
Mummy is pushing her pram.
David is going to soccer.
Sally is making me a cake.
I know she's here.
There are some other toys.
She's riding her skateboard very fast.
The old bike in here used to be my sister's.
The boy over there was calling the dog.
The cat went under the chair in the house.
For the wedding Aunty gave us a vase.
The lady heard what the man was saying to the boy.
Here is my sister driving in her motorcar.
The boy hit the ball far across the field.
Be very careful diving where there's a deep pool.
That man and the one over there like to read the paper.
Some of the people spoke quickly to each other at the
football.
The old teacher told his class a funny story.
The mother knows how much milk we need for the cake.
There goes the policeman who caught out the thief at
the bakery.
My sister usually puts some meat outside for the dog.

Total – 21 sentences.

Appendix 3: Teaching Unit

Teaching students who have difficulty comprehending written text synonyms and to paraphrase, will assist them to comprehend what they are reading and enable them to successfully retell a given text.

The three students involved in this research were from the middle years of the primary school. All three boys were in Year 4 and were taken as a withdrawal group within their class literacy sessions. During this time they are usually working in a literacy support group with six other students also in Year 4. The three students in the control group were also members of this support group. Each intervention session was for thirty to forty five minutes.

This research links into the MLOTP model at sentence level comprehension with a topic level of recognising the main ideas in a paragraph.

Session 1

- * Group given a word, each asked to provide a word that means the same – synonym
- * Repeat the step several times, compiling a word bank.
- * Discuss what these words are called synonyms and what a synonym is (a word that means the same as another word)
- * Students record the definition in their work books as well as recording several of the words and their synonyms e.g. pretty – beautiful, lawn – grass, hungry – starving, mad - angry
- * Words in the word bank are placed onto card and used in word games – Bingo and Concentration

Session 2

- * Commence the session by playing the card games introduced last session.
- * Revise the definition of a synonym
- * Add any synonyms that the students have thought of since the session to the word bank.
- * Teacher writes a sentence on the board. e.g. ‘Peter and Sam went down the street.’ Replace the verb ‘went.’ Each student has a turn and these words are listed on the board.
- * Teacher models paraphrasing the whole sentence orally.
- * Each student then has a turn of paraphrasing the sentence, these are recorded on the board. Discuss which sentence / sentences have the same meaning as the original.
- * Ask the children what other words in the sentence can be replaced using a synonym. When all students have had their turn, discuss which sentence has the most words changed. Decide which sentence / sentences have the same meaning as the original.

Session 3

- * Using the sentence, 'Sally and Jane went to the doctors because they were sick.' Repeat the steps outlined in the last session.
- * Discuss the procedure followed for each sentence:-
 - read the sentence
 - what do you think it means
 - how could you say this in your own words
 - highlight the main topic words in the sentence
 - what other words could you use that still mean the same (use a thesaurus if the students are having difficulty)
 - these words are called synonyms
 - retell your sentence in your own words
- * Inform the students that this procedure is called paraphrasing. Have the procedure written out on a chart to display in the room.
- * Each student is then given a sentence strip and asked to follow the outlined procedure to paraphrase their sentence.
- * Share and discuss their individual sentences.

Session 4

- * Introduce a new sentence. Ask the students to 'picture it in their head'. Discuss what they see. Then get them to follow the procedure outlined on the chart from last session. Share their sentences, encouraging them to cover their sentence before they retell it.
- * Introduce the verbalization of the procedure followed when we read -
 - read the sentence
 - picture it in your mind
 - cover the sentence
 - retell it in your own words
- * Model the above procedure using a second sentence.
- * Give each student a sentence strip, give them time to rehearse the procedure.
- * Share their sentences.

Session 5

- * Revise the verbalization of the procedure outlined in the previous session.
- * Introduce a fictional text, "Daniel's Dinosaurs" by Mary Carmine (Scholastic 1990)
- * Verbalising the strategy before reading, the students read the sentence, picture it, cover the sentence and retell it in their own words.
- * At the end of each paragraph, discuss what the main ideas are, retell the paragraph in their own words.

Sessions 6, 7, 8, 9

- * Following the procedure set in the last session, making sure that the students verbalise the strategy before they implement it.

- * Have the students working with fictional and non-fictional texts.
- * The students read the text one sentence at a time and then paraphrase it. At the end of each paragraph discuss the main ideas of that paragraph.

Session 10

- * A Shared Wall Story – “The Lonely Giant”, by Lucy Lawrence & Craig Smith. (Literacy Links, Mimosa. 1993)
- * The story is read to the group.
- * Each student is given two sequential paragraphs to read.
- * Working individually, their task is to use the paraphrase strategy to create an illustrated wall story to be shared at the completion of the session. (one sheet of paper for each paragraph).
- * Students must verbalise the strategy before working on each sentence / paragraph.
- * Before sharing the completed wall story, discuss as a group the main ideas of the story.
- * Read the completed Wall Story.
- * As a group, evaluate their story focusing on whether the initial meaning is retained.

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