

Teaching prep students visualization strategies will improve students oral retell of short fiction texts.

ABSTRACT

Prep students were taught to visualize to improve their oral retell ability after listening to short fiction texts. Students with low oral language scores were selected for the study and were given pre and post listening comprehension and oral retell tests to assess their oral retell. Students in the experimental group who received the intervention in visualization outperformed students who did not receive intervention. The findings of the study revealed that teaching visualization to prep level students improved students oral retell abilities.

INTRODUCTION

Prep level students arrive at school with varied experiences of life and literature, it is apparent that many prep students have difficulty visualizing and recalling a mental images within their minds which affects their ability to articulate a complete retell of short fiction texts.

“Reading comprehension, the ability to understand and retain the details, sequence and make meaning from written material is a basic skill that is one of the critical elements of any primary-level education.” (Rose, 2000) Research strongly suggests that reading comprehension is improved by explicit teaching of visualization strategies. Mental imagery is defined by Douville (2004) as the process of forming internal pictures of objects or events that are not present to the eye that can affect later recall and comprehension Rose(2000) suggests that teaching imagery increases the ability of the working memory during reading and therefore works as a framework for organizing concepts and ideas linked within the text as a whole The ability to make images in ones mind is integral to students retelling ability and visualization is therefore highly regarded by educators as a key component of teaching reading. As Wilhelm (1995) states scenes from our reading can be burnt into our memories forever.

Research suggests that educators implement visualization or mental imagery strategies in a variety of ways. Concepts such as making a picture in the mind are popular across educational and psychological fields. It is commonly accepted that teaching mental imagery is best approached through a scaffold approach The transferring of teacher directed to student directed learning is essential to developing students independence in reading comprehension. (Guerrero,2003). In this structure the learning moves from concrete to abstract. (Wilhelm 1995)“Empowering students in their own learning is facilitated by teaching them effective meaning making strategies that support active participation in their own learning.” (Douville, 2004) Douville (2004) defines mental imagery education’s effect on comprehension as providing a double duty, that is, the instruction is effective for educators and it works independently of continuous feedback and monitoring. Douville (2004) is clear in her belief that teaching visualization involves situations where students create their own personally significant images and have control over the process. She therefore discourages reliance upon guided imagery formats where educators engage in providing students with their own imagery for students to observe. It becomes apparent that researchers are pushing educators to take a step-back when teaching and provide students with the skills necessary to engage in their own unprompted visualization to improve their own comprehension.

Much of the research surrounding visualization is aimed at students in the middle and upper primary years. The research is based on reading abilities and visualization is used to improve reading accuracy and comprehension. This study aims to use a younger target group of non-readers to investigate the impact of visualization on oral retell. Students who are not yet print literate should still be able to develop their visualization skills through oral language rather than written or read text formats. Moving on from the traditional ‘make a picture in your mind’ strategy of teaching visualization this study aims to incorporate programs from CEO speech pathologists as well as implementing aspects of the SAM Sensory Activation model. The aspects of SAM that this study intends to implement are those of assisting students to self-construct elaborated images that evoke a range of the senses rather than just relying on the visual sense. (Douville 2004) The Catholic Education Office speech pathology language unit that will be implemented in this study is the “Language in pictures” program. This particular program includes cues and prompts for children to use when visualizing. The specific prompt types used with prep aged children are the; who, what, where prompts. It is the aim of this study to incorporate a range of visualization strategies within the teaching program to best cater to all the senses and abilities of the students. Through combined use of strategies and programs it is hope that students will achieve a higher success rate in their visualization skills and thus their oral retell will improve.

The focus of this study is on oral retell. Much of the lesson design will be based around oral language activities as the students in the study are non-readers. Rose (2000) states that if reading is made less dependent on memory of text and focuses instead on visual images described in the story then readers are likely to store retain and recall more about what they read. Recall and sequencing of events from text is crucial to the improvement of students oral retelling of fiction texts. It is therefore the intention of this study to give students the opportunity to engage in many meaningful conversations about pictures and text to provide them with sufficient vocabulary to engage in a retelling tasks. Building the vocabulary networks of the students is a key component in preparing the students for improved oral retell. Many prep level students hold pictures in their minds but are unable to link the vocabulary to their pictures. It is hoped that this study will give students a forum for building their vocabulary networks and improving their oral language skills whilst undertaking the learning of visualization.

PREDICTION

Teaching prep students visualization strategies will improve students oral retell of short fiction texts.

METHOD

Design: This study follows an OXO design. It consists of a control and experimental group to test the effectiveness of the teaching of visualization to students.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants are 6 prep grade students who presented difficulties in oral retelling of short texts. All the participants are aged 5 years. The students for the study were selected using scores from a record of oral language text undertaken prior to the intervention. The test was given to a wide group of prep students and the students who scored the lowest on the test were admitted into the study. The Record of oral language test asks students to repeat a sentence back to the administrator and they are scored with a

single point for each correct sentence repetition. The results from the record of oral language are set out below. These results formed the basis for entry into the intervention. Note the highest possible score for the test is 42.

RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE SCORES

Student A	14
Student B	16
Student C	13
Student D	17
Student E	13
Student F	14

The group was then broken into two groups, an experimental and control group. The basis for the decision was to evenly match the groups, because the students are non-readers the matching of the groups was not based on previous data collected from the students but rather based on gender and performance on the pre and post tests. Each group consisted of two female students and one male student. Each group had one student who had performed higher on the listening comprehension test than the other two students in their group.

MATERIALS:

Materials used include the following

Record of Oral Language Test

Clay, M. (2000) An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement: New Zealand: Heinemann.

Listening Comprehension Test

Munro, J. (2006) Listening Comprehension Text: Faculty of Education, Melbourne University.

Language in Pictures Program

Catholic Education Office. (2000). Language in Pictures: Language Program.

Foundations Texts

Iversen, S. (1996) A Trip to the Video Store. Macmillan Education, South Melbourne.

Iversen, S. (1996) The roller Blades. Macmillan Education, South Melbourne.

Who, What Where cue cards for each child.

Variety of coloured pictures for children to investigate.

PROCEDURE

The students were involved in a record of oral language test to determine their suitability for intervention. Six students were decided upon. The students then performed a pre test involving a spontaneous retell and a listening comprehension test. The target group of six was then split into two groups, one control group and one experimental group. Once students had completed their pre testing the intervention began. The teaching sessions

were conducted over 10 consecutive school days (with some public holidays in between). The sessions lasted for 20 minutes and were conducted each morning during the literacy block within the classroom setting. Students involved in the experimental group were taken in a small group focus session for the 20 minutes.

Each session varied in structure and form however the focus of the lesson design was to give students a scaffolded approach to learning visualization strategies. (See appendix for full description of lessons) The lessons began using concrete examples for visualization and moved to abstract visualization. At the conclusion of each lesson students were asked to explain what had been learnt that day to encourage students to take control of their own learning. The teacher used drawings and anecdotal records across the sessions to provide evidence of development in the students.

At the conclusion of the ten teaching sessions students were given a post test which was similar to the pre test. The listening comprehension test was used again in exactly the same format and a new text at the same level was selected for the student's spontaneous retell. The record of oral language was not used in the post test as this was a pre-determinate as to the students' suitability for intervention and not part of the pre test.

RESULTS

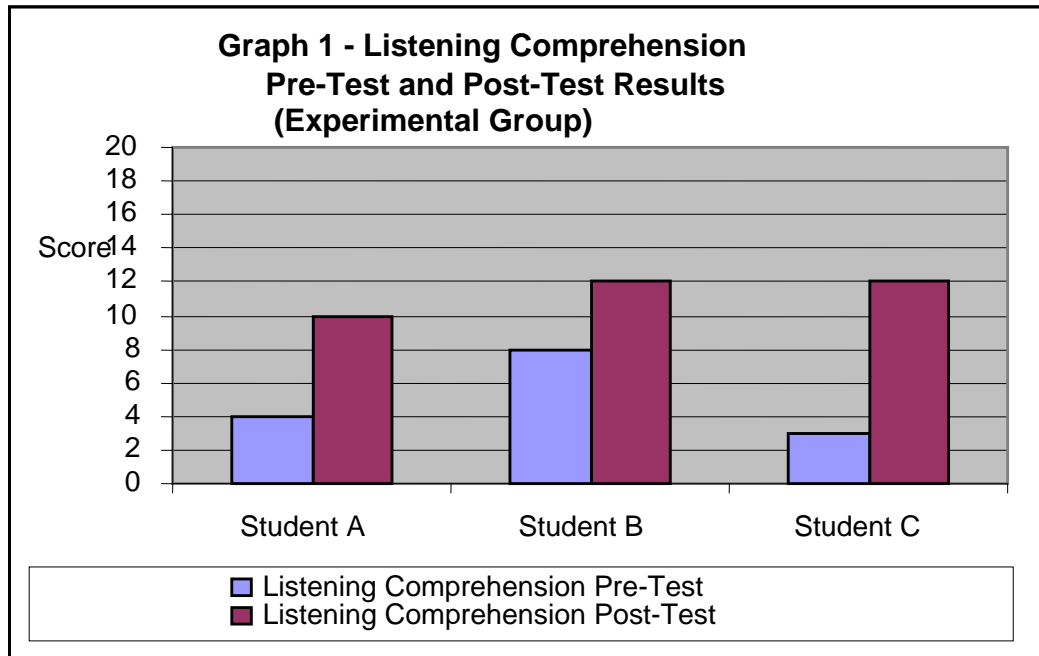
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

	ROL	Listening Comprehension Pre-test	Listening Comprehension Post-test	Spontaneous retell pre-test	Spontaneous retell post-test
Student A	14	4/20	10/20	6.5/15	10.5/18
Student B	16	8/20	12/20	4/15	14/18
Student C	13	3/20	12/20	4/15	11/18

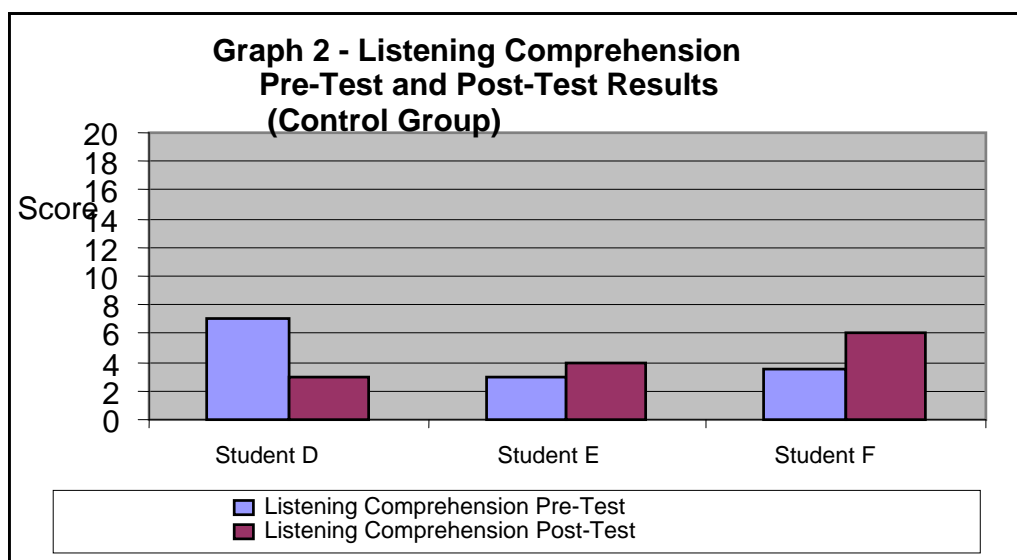
CONTROL GROUP

Student D	17	7/20	3/20	5/15	7/18
Student E	13	3/20	4/20	6/15	6/18
Student F	14	3.5/20	6/20	2.5/15	6/18

RESULTS

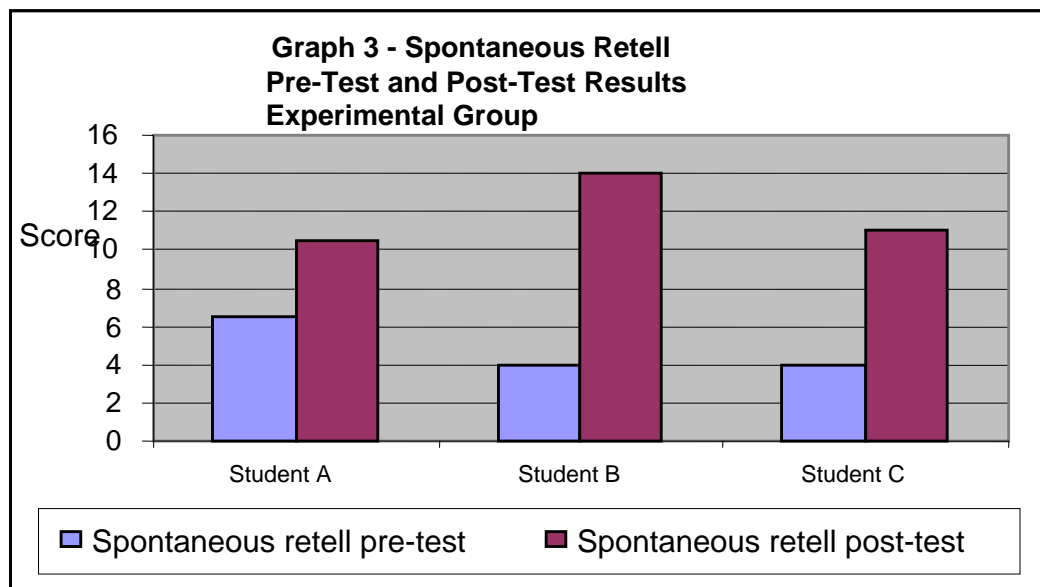


Graph 1 shows that students involved in the visualization intervention improved in their listening comprehension post-tests. Student A scored 20% in listening comprehension pre-test and improved to 50% in the post-test. This was an overall increase of 30% for student A. Student B completed 40% in the pre test for listening comprehension and improved to 60% in the post test. This was an overall increase of 20% for student B. Student C scored 15% in the listening comprehension pre-test and increased to 60% in the post test. This was an overall increase of 45%. This graph shows a clear improvement for students in the experimental group. Each student who was involved in the focused teaching of visualization improved greatly in their listening comprehension ability.



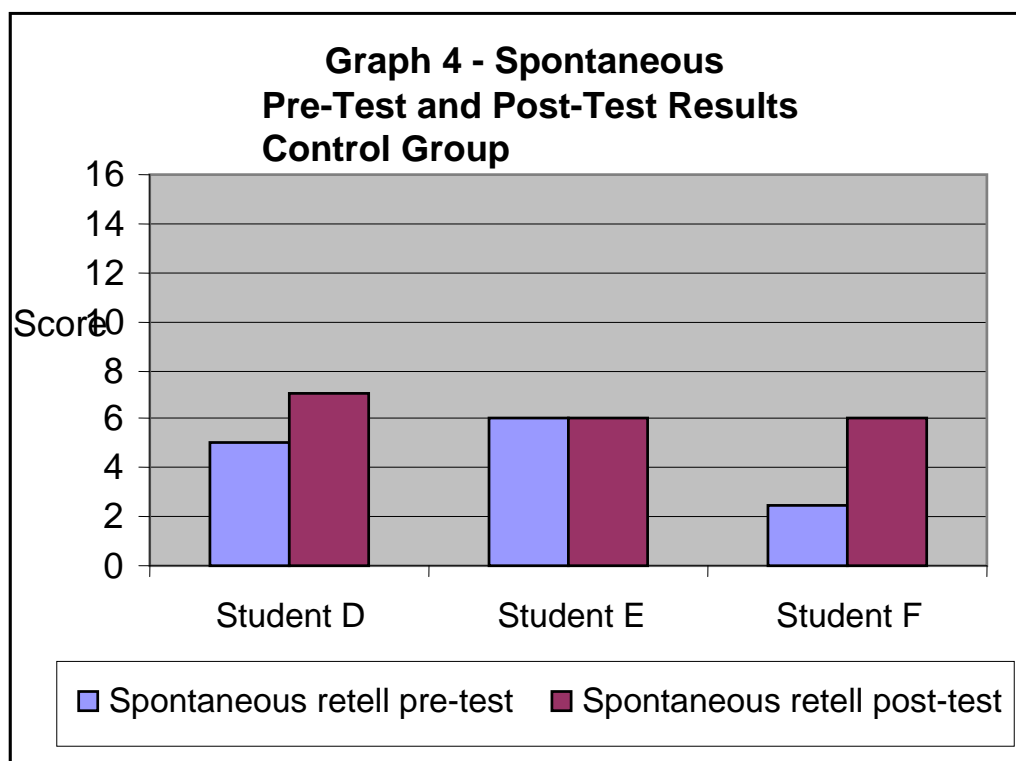
RESULTS

Graph 2 shows the results for the control group in listening comprehension. Student D showed a 20% decrease in their post-test score in listening comprehension. In the pretest they scored 35% and only scored 15% in the post test. Student E improved by 5% in their post-test for listening comprehension. Their pre-test score was 15% and their post test score was 20%. Student F scored 18% in their listening comprehension pre-test and increased their score to 30% in the listening comprehension post-test. This gave student F an overall improvement of 12%. Graph 2 shows mixed results for the students in the control group. Student D went backwards and students E and F showed only marginal improvement in their post testing data. The ten day period between pre and post testing may account for the improvement in students E and F as general classroom teaching and developmental growth may have improved their listening comprehension skills moderately. The decrease for student D in listening comprehension is very significant, although there is no evidence to support a decrease in scores. This could be due to a confounding variable such as student attitude or attention span but it would be unwise to draw any concrete conclusions without sufficient evidence as to what factors influenced this student on the day of testing. No noticeable changes were recorded for this student and therefore no clear confirmation can be given as to why student D performed so poorly in their post test in listening comprehension.



Graph 3 shows the results for students spontaneous retelling in the experimental group. All students showed significant gains in their spontaneous retell. Student A improved from 41% to 66% in their spontaneous retell. Student B made a 63% increase in their spontaneous retelling ability, improving from 25% in the first retell to 88% in the post test retell. Student C scored 25% in their pre test and 69% in their post test showing an increase of 44%. All students showed improvements of 25% or more with the largest improvement being 69%. It is clear from this data that all students varied greatly in their results, however the data proves the hypothesis that students who receive visualization teaching will improve in their oral retell ability.

RESULTS



Graph 4 shows the results for the control group's pre and post spontaneous retell. The students in this group showed either the same results or slightly improved results in their retell. Student D's pre test result was 31% and their post test result was 44 % showing a 13% increase. Student E scored 38 % on both the pre and post test, showing no improvement in their retell. Student F scored 16% on their pre test for spontaneous retell and scored 38% on their post test, this equates to a 22% improvement. Student F showed the most significant gains and student E showed the least improvement in retelling. This data shows that students can increase in their oral retell without teacher intervention, however the gains are inconsistent and variable across the three students. Student F's pre test was the lowest improved by the most in their post test. Student F who scored the highest pre test showed no improvement and student D who scored between student F and E on their pre test scored the highest result in their post test.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to determine the impact that teaching visualization strategies to prep students would have on their oral retell abilities. All students involved in the study gained positive results in their oral retell regardless of being in the experimental or the control group. The data shows however that students in the experimental group made more significant gains than those in the control group. The overall trend showed that the intervention group outperformed the control group in all areas. The performance of all members of the intervention group supported the hypothesis that teaching visualization improves oral retell.

The previous studies undertaken in visualization all revolved around students in grades 2 and above. The current study used students who were non-readers and the findings supported the notion that oral retell and visualization are strongly linked and are not in fact reliant upon reading. The students involved showed weak results in their record of oral language tests and therefore were noted to have difficulty remembering and retelling sentences, usually sentences with one or more actions. The study revealed that non-reading students were capable of engaging in oral retell and students who were supported in their learning of visualization gained higher results than those who were not given support. Douville (2004) suggests in her study of visualization that teaching students' visualization through personally significant topics enhances visualization. The findings in this study support her theory and all students in the intervention group were given many opportunities to engage in personally significant visualization before moving on to abstract visualization. Students A,B and C were offered opportunities to retell events occurring in their own lives and by using the who, what, when cue cards taken from the Catholic Education Office program students were supported through their oral retells.

The results of the experimental group were as expected. They all made significant gains in their oral retell and performed higher in their post testing than in their pre testing. The study did however raise questions for the control group. The results of the control group were varied and it is interesting to investigate the reasons for some of their improvements. Student D showed a large decrease in their listening comprehension test and yet showed an increase in their spontaneous retell. Student F recorded a higher result in their listening comprehension post test and the same results for their pre and post spontaneous retell task. Student F showed good improvement of approximately 3 points for both the listening comprehension task and the spontaneous retell task. The results of the control group encourage further investigation as to why some students still showed improvement although they were not involved in the intervention. One factor which may have influenced these students to gain higher results could be basic classroom teaching time. Prep students make rapid gains in short periods of time, the study was undertaken over approximately 3 weeks which may have given students sufficient time to improve their vocabulary and memory which may have influenced their results. All the students involved in the study are non-readers and the listening component may have assisted them to visualize where if they were readers they may not have visualized as much. The results for the control group were variable and the variations in their results suggests that the gains or losses made in their post testing are not necessarily a true indication of their abilities. This group would require further testing to provide clearer results.

A further question raised from the results of the control group is what were the control group doing already to help them in their oral retells? The study did not assess students' strategies during the retell process. It would be interesting to undertake further investigation into the strategies these students already had in place in order to help them retell. Were they relying on memory or did they visualize already without realizing it? In future research it would be advisable to investigate the control group more thoroughly to discover the meta-cognitive processes they used and the visualization strategies they used.

Previous studies have focused around the impact visualization training has on reading comprehension. This study focused on students who were non-readers and therefore investigated their listening comprehension and oral retell. The results proved that non-reading students were still capable of improvement in oral retell with visualization

training; however it would be interesting to further investigate the implications of visualization instruction on their reading abilities later in their school careers. I raises the question: what impact will visualization practice in the early years of school made on their future reading abilities? Further longitudinal studies on these students is recommended and inquiries into their reading accuracy and comprehension levels as they progress through their schooling could provide further evidence that teaching visualization in prep influences students abilities to read later in their school life.

IMPLICATIONS

This study revealed that students who are given visualization intervention will make positive gains in their oral retelling abilities. The results of the control and experimental groups were not as clear cut as expected and therefore it reveled that students in the control group would gain from some intervention in visualization strategies. The basic teaching sequence of visualization that was given to the students in the experimental group could easily be adapted for whole class instruction and it is suggested that further teaching of visualization to prep classes be undertaken to improve literacy skills in prep students. It is believed that by providing students with the tools to monitor their own visualization students in prep will gain higher results in their record of oral language scores at the end of the year and will improve in their oral language skills. As suggested in the discussion results in students reading abilities could also be tracked as a whole class is introduced to visualization. The results conclusively suggest that prep students are capable of visualization and that use of visualization strategies will substantially improve their oral language and retell skills.

LIMITATIONS

The study undertaken was not without limitations; however the students were offered continuity in their sessions which were always held in the classroom by the same teacher. One limitation of the study is the short period of intervention given. The students involved in the study were given 10 sessions of visualization intervention and no visualization strategies were implemented intentionally within the classroom environment during this time. If students had been given more time both in small group and whole group sessions to practice their visualizations it is believed their results may have been even better. The testing undertaken for this study was effective for investigating the students retelling abilities, however further assessment into the students' self-efficacy and meta-cognitive strategies could have given further evidence to the results and may have helped to explain the variable results of the control group in the study.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As mentioned in the discussion further tracking of the students involved in this study would provide relevant information and help to further conclude that prep students who engage in explicit visualization teaching will improve their oral retell. It is suggested that all teachers in the junior classrooms implement visualization strategies during their shared and guided reading sessions and note improvements in oral language and retell within their classrooms. It would be of interest to investigate the impact of teaching visualization on a broader range of subjects and perhaps track the results over time. It is the belief of the author that all students can benefit from visualization and not just literate students. It would be advantageous to implement visualization across a whole school to improve literacy rates within a school. It is clear however that teaching prep students visualization improves their oral retell.

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APPENDIX 1

Lesson Design

	Intro	Development	Skill Practise	Conclusion	Self Reflection/Assessment
1	Explain to children that when we see a picture we can take a photo of it and put it into our mind. The photo we have in our mind can be revisited again and again.	Practise taking a photo and putting it into our minds. Use pictures from library sets (senses, family, counting) Children practice on two pictures. Teacher takes the picture away and students recall all they can about the picture. Teacher may prompt towards the end if students struggle.	Teacher shows the children the pictures again. Discuss what was missed from our discussion. This time the teacher asks students to think about “Who” is in the picture. The students put a picture in their mind of who is in the picture. Picture is hidden and then returned.	Reiterate that we can take photos of pictures and place them in our mind. When we look at a picture we can see who is in the picture.	Children tell what they have learnt to do in the session.
2	Recall with students the activity undertaken last time. Ask students “What were we learning to do last time.” Reiterate the importance of taking a picture and of knowing who is in the picture.	Provide students with a who prompt card. Practise looking at a new picture using the who prompt card so students are looking at who is in the picture. After a brief practice introduce students to the what prompt card. Brainstorm ideas for what vocab- eg- standing, sitting, running, jumping, sleeping, eating.	Students practice on two more pictures using the who and what cards in unison and on their own. Discuss what the “What card can tell us. Eg- what are they doing? What are they wearing? What	Explain that today we learnt the skill of seeing who was in a picture and what was in a picture. Practise the who and what cards in unison on one final picture.	Children tell the skills that they learnt in the session today. What was one thing they improved on this session?
3	Explain that today will be the last session using actual pictures. Students are asked to recall the pictures they have seen so far in the sessions. Explain to children that the pictures we make in our minds are always there for us to revisit.	Practise on a new picture using the WHO and WHAT cues. Introduce the WHERE cue and use it on a picture that students have already seen. Brainstorm ideas for WHERE vocab. Eg- inside, outside, on top, underneath, in front, behind.	Students practice on new pictures using the who, what and where cues to prompt their retelling. Teacher to insist on full sentences for retell. Use prompt – Can you tell me any more about ...?	Review the cue cards of who what and where. What does each one mean? What is some of the vocab that might be associated with each one.	Drawing – Children draw a picture of who was in one of the pictures studied. They draw a where and what picture for one of the pictures shown today.

4	<p>Students bring their who, what, where cue cards to the session.</p> <p>Teacher describes a situation to the students which they are asked to make a picture of.</p> <p>Eg- I went to the beach and played with my beach ball.</p>	<p>Students attempt to retell the scene using their cue cards.</p> <p>Students are given time to develop their own scenario. They must describe something using the who, what where cards.</p>	<p>Students listen to each others scenario and retell it using the cue cards.</p> <p>Brainstorm with students what had to be done in order to make the picture in their minds. How did they imagine certain things?</p>	<p>Explain that prior experiences help us imagine things we cant see. Eg- the beach I imagine might be a different beach to the one you imagine. But it is meaningful for each of us and that is how we remember the picture.</p>	
5	<p>Ask students to recall some of the pictures they have in their minds from previous sessions. Reiterate that these images are able to be revisited and sometimes we can change our images.</p>	<p>Use the Record of Oral language to introduce simple and complex sentences for students to visualize. Use the WHO WHAT WHEN cue cards to retell.</p>	<p>Give each student a different sentence to retell. Students are given time to formulate a picture in their minds. They are asked to tell what is happening in the picture but also to describe their own visul image in detail.</p> <p>Eg what are they wearing? How many people? What colour are the things you imagine?</p>		
6	<p>Introduce SAM – a character who can smell a mouse 100 miles away, who can taste lollies 100 times sweeter than everyone else.</p>	<p>Children take sam (A cut out prompt of a boy) outside to investigate the playground. They must come back and describe what sam saw, felt, heard and tasted.</p>	<p>Listen to the images presented by students. Teacher makes a list of words to do with senses eg- hard, soft, sweet, smooth, rough.</p> <p>Discuss synonyms for the words they use.</p> <p>Use one of the new brainstormed words to re-describe something that was in the playground.</p>		<p>Draw a picture about what sam saw, felt, heard, and tasted on his trip to the playground.</p>
7	<p>Revisit Sam. Who is he. How does he help us when we make picture sin our mind??</p>	<p>Explain that today sam is going to come into a story with us. Teacher reads Ben’s Treasure Hunt”</p>	<p>Teacher pauses at each page for students to get their images and think about what SAM might see etc.</p> <p>Children look at</p>		

			pictures and describe in sentences what Sam might see etc.		
8	Revisit WHO WHAT WHERE cards. Students are asked to use the cards to retell a story. A home for little teddy.	Break up the children and explain that one will tell the beginning of the story. One will tell the middle and one will tell the end.	Encourage children to draw pictures to help jog their memory when they retell the story. Teacher pauses at each section of the story so children can draw their ideas.		Use drawings as assessment indicator.
9	Use pictures from library with students. Get students to tell what they see in their minds.	Ask students what they did this time that they didn't do the first time when they viewed pictures.	Use oral stories and ask students to retell. What did they do this time that they didn't do the first time? Try a story Sausage. Children retell and then explain what they did this time that they didnt do last time.	Review some strategies that have been taught. Make a picture? Take SAM with you. Who, what , where caards.	Ask students how they feel about retelling stories. What helps them the most?
10	Explain that Students are not using cards today they are going to do all the thinking by themselves. Brainstorm some strategies orally that the students might use.	Teacher reads a short fiction text for the students to retell.	Students retell the text to the teacher. Teacher uses this time to recognize any areas where individual students need assistance.	Teacher to give individual instruction to each student about what to do in the next story. Repeat process.	Anecdotal. Does the retell improve with prompting.

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