

Abstract

A number of students in the middle primary school year level, who are good decoders, have difficulty comprehending what they are reading. These children are often able to decode at a class appropriate level with high accuracy in word recognition, but lack the skills required to gain meaning from the text. If not rectified, this problem escalates as children progress through the upper primary grades and into secondary school, where so much of their education is reliant upon them accessing information and gaining knowledge from texts.

The hypothesis of this study is that **teaching Year Three / Four students to use synonyms as part of paraphrasing, improves their reading comprehension level.**

Previous research suggests that children need to be taught specific strategies to enable them to identify and make meaning from text. One such strategy is paraphrasing.

This study used a case study OXO design. The study compared two groups of four students, a Control Group and an Intervention Group. The Intervention Group were withdrawn 3-4 times a week for a series of ten, 30- minute lessons, in which they were taught to use synonyms to assist them to paraphrase what they were reading.

Results of the post-testing support the hypothesis that teaching synonyms as part of paraphrasing improves their reading comprehension, with all students in the

Intervention Group improving in their ability to use synonyms and to paraphrase.

Subsequently, they all showed significant gains in their reading comprehension.

The results suggest that the teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing are successful strategies and should be taught explicitly to assist students to improve their reading comprehension level.

Introduction

A number of students in the middle primary school year level, who are good decoders, have difficulty comprehending what they are reading. These children are often able to decode at a class appropriate level with high accuracy in word recognition, but lack the skills required to gain meaning from the text. If not rectified, this problem escalates as children progress through the upper primary grades and into secondary school, where so much of their education is reliant upon them accessing information and gaining knowledge from texts.

The reading process involves many multifaceted skills which together lead to rich understanding of text, which is of course, our main purpose for reading.

Comprehension in reading means understanding what is read. It is a complex process whereby readers must use existing knowledge to interpret, organise, reflect upon and make links with the new information they are reading. Skilled readers are good comprehenders. They differ from unskilled readers in their use of general word knowledge to comprehend text literally as well as draw valid inferences from texts.

They also differ in their comprehension of words, and in their use of comprehension monitoring and repair strategies. (Parker, Hasbrouck & Denton, 2002). Good readers automatically use a range of comprehension strategies as they read, enabling them to make predictions, infer and make connections. Pressley (1999; cited in Westwood, 2001) states that good comprehenders are effective users of comprehension strategies when they work, while Munro (2008) states that readers process written text at a number of levels; sentence, conceptual and topic, using a variety of strategies, as identified in his model of reading, referred to as the 'multiple levels of text processing', (MLOTP).

There are a number of children however, who struggle to make sense of the text they are reading. These children do not automatically use strategies to extract meaning and information from texts and need to be taught explicit strategies to assist in reading comprehension. (Adams, Treiman & Pressley, 1998; Graves, Juel & Graves, 1998; Lyon 1998; Turner 1995, cited in Westwood 2003).

According to Adams, Treiman & Pressley (1998) Graves, Juel & Graves (1998), Lyon (1998) and Turner (1995) cited in Westwood (2003), children need to be taught the necessary skills and strategies to identify words and make meaning from text. Magliano, Trabasso & Graesser (1999) and Westwood (2003) cite numerous research studies indicating that comprehension can be improved by strategic teaching of skills. One such strategy is paraphrasing. Many studies conducted over the years have shown that the explicit teaching of paraphrasing, improves the reading comprehension level of students who have reading difficulties.

Paraphrasing, as stated by Munro (2008) is a key strategy used by effective readers. It involves readers retelling the sentence 'in their own words', helping them to internalise what they have read and make it their own. Sewell (2007) also agrees that paraphrasing is a vital skill in reading comprehension, stating that the most important skill of reading comprehension is the ability to restate information in one's own words.

There is further evidence to show that paraphrasing improves comprehension. Harris and Sipay (1990), Katims and Harris (1997), Shugarman and Hurst (1986) cited in Fisk and Hurst (2003) have all found that paraphrasing can be useful to promote reading comprehension as it reinforces skills such as identifying the main ideas,

finding supporting details, and identifying the author's voice. Harris and Sipay (1990) cited in Fisk and Hirst (2003) observed that being able to tell another's thoughts in language that one understands, is a crucial test on whether the thoughts were understood.

In their study, Katims and Harris (1997) found that teaching the RAP strategy, developed by Schumaker, Denton & Deshler (1984), helps students of all abilities to remember, think about and restate what they had read. In this strategy, students are taught the acronym, RAP, to help them remember the comprehension strategy:

Read the text.

Ask yourself questions about the main ideas and details.

Put the ideas into your own words and try to change as many words as you can.

Parker, Hasbrouck & Denton (2002) also identified paraphrasing as a skill that assists students to learn content and accomplish tasks, as well as assisting students to maintain interest and concentration.

My research aims to extend the earlier research by examining the influence that teaching synonyms as part of paraphrasing has on the overall reading comprehension level of a small group of grade 3 /4 students, identified as having difficulties. The focus will be on using synonyms for the key words within a text, to develop students understanding and enable them to restate in words that they understand, the author's thoughts. My prediction is that developing meaning at the sentence level through the explicit teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing will improve the reading comprehension level of year 3 /4 students.

Method

Design

This study uses a case study OXO design. Gains in paraphrasing ability and reading comprehension, following explicit teaching of synonyms and the paraphrasing strategy are monitored for Grade 3 /4 students in a naturalistic classroom setting. The study compares two groups of four students, an intervention group and a control group.

Participants

Name	Intervention or Control Group	Sex	Age in Years	Age in Months	Grade Level	Reading Level	ESL	Earlier Intervention	EMA
Student A	I	F	8.5yrs	101months	3	Level 25	N	Reading Recovery 132 lessons over 32 weeks Bridges	N
Student B	I	F	9.8yrs	116months	4	Level 28	N	Reading Recovery 50 lessons over 13 weeks Bridges	N
Student C	I	F	8.7yrs	103months	3	Level 28	Y	Bridges	N
Student D	I	F	8.10yrs	106months	3	Level 28	N	Reading Recovery 57 lessons over 14 weeks	N
Student E	C	M	8.8yrs	104months	3	Level 28	N	Reading Recovery 30 lessons over 20 weeks Bridges	N
Student F	C	F	8.5yrs	101months	3	Level 28+	Y		N
Student G	C	F	9.6yrs	114months	4	Level 28	N	Bridges	N
Student H	C	F	8.3yrs	99months	3	Level 28	Y	Bridges	N

The students chosen to participate in this study are all in the middle primary school years, with ages ranging from 99 months to 116 months. Students were chosen after classroom teachers expressed concern at their lack of progress in the area of literacy,

in particular reading comprehension. After consultation with the Special Education teacher, it was felt that these children would benefit from additional assistance, to work explicitly on synonyms and the strategy of paraphrasing to develop their understanding of texts.

Materials

Materials Used Include the following:

Texts used for assessment: Each participant completed three tasks prior to and after the intervention.

- 1) A reading comprehension task using cloze procedure. Reading comprehension was assessed using the Torch Test, 'Lizards Love Eggs'.
- 2) A task that assessed the strategy of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing was assessed using John Munro's Paraphrasing Test.
- 3) A task that assessed synonym knowledge. This was assessed using John Munro's Synonyms Test.

Materials used in teaching strategy:

- 1) Syllables Matching Game – Teacher devised, using words from guided reading text. List of words in Lesson plan in Appendix 1.
- 2) Guided Reading Texts – 'Shosun's Mistake' by John Lockyer (Level 23)
'What A Haircut' by Patricia Gray (Level 23)
'Frank and Sam's Summer at Aramoana' by Liane Farry (Level 25)

Additional materials: An additional reading comprehension task using the cloze procedure was conducted with the Intervention Group as a post-test. This was assessed using the Torch Test, 'At the Zoo'.

Procedure

Eight students were assessed prior to intervention using the following tasks and in the following order: Torch- Tests of Reading Comprehension by Mossenson et al, John Munro's Paraphrasing Test and John Munro's Synonyms Task. These tests ascertained each student's reading age, reading accuracy and reading comprehension, along with their knowledge of synonyms and their ability to paraphrase. The pre and post- tests were conducted in a group situation, where children were required to write their individual responses.

The students were then divided into two groups of four – a control group and an intervention group. The control group was taught a series of ten 30- minute lessons in which they were taught to use synonyms to assist them to paraphrase what they were reading. Three to four lessons were held each week, commencing a week after pre-testing. Children were withdrawn from the classroom for the lessons and taught as a group of four. The week following the completion of lesson 10, both the control group and the intervention group were once again assessed using the same tasks as in the pre-test, in the following order: Torch, Paraphrasing Test and Synonyms Test, and the results were compared. The same Torch test was administered as a post- test due to inaccessibility at that time to any other Torch tests. However, due to dramatic change in the results from the Torch pre-test to the post-test, the Torch testing booklet was borrowed from another school and the next test was administered to the children in the Intervention Group only.

The activities implemented with each group were as follows:

Session 1: Teacher and children discussed what a synonym is and listed synonyms for words such as big, little. Children played a teacher devised synonym game using words from their guided reading text.

Children matched and shared synonyms and teacher listed on a chart. Any further words the children could think of were added.

Session 2: Teacher revised synonyms with children and added any others the children had thought of to the chart. Teacher presents sentence from Session 1 text to children, breaking it into meaningful parts. As a group children come up with synonyms for each part. Link the synonyms into a statement and say the synonyms in a sentence. Check meaning and repeat with a number of other sentences.

Session 3 and 4: Children share any synonyms they have come up with since last session and teacher lists on a chart. Teacher presents children with a small number of words underlined. Children list some synonyms for these words. Together, look at one sentence at a time, segment it into meaningful parts and link the synonyms into a sentence. Say it another way so it means the same thing. Have children verbalise the steps – Read the sentence, Break it into parts, Write synonyms for as many words as possible, Say the sentence another way so that it means the same think. Have children verbalise what they did and how paraphrasing helps them.

Session 5 and 6: Children verbalise the steps they go through when they paraphrase. Children read aloud a different passage each from guided reading text. Each child is given a sentence, in which they have to follow the paraphrasing steps. Each child reads their original sentence and then their paraphrased attempt. Group discusses whether each sentence retained the original meaning. Share thoughts on the sessions and what was helpful.

Session 7: Students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Teacher gives each child a ‘challenge sheet’, where they are required to paraphrase 5 sentences individually. On completion, each child takes turns to read their paraphrased sentence. As a group, decide which sentence is the closest in meaning to the original sentence. Repeat with all sentences and share thoughts on the lesson.

Sessions 8 and 9: Students verbalise what they do when they paraphrase. Each child takes turns to read aloud a short passage from the guided reading text. Using two sentences each, the children follow the steps to paraphrase. They then read the original sentences and then their paraphrased sentences and discuss as a group whether or not the meaning was retained and whether there were any other synonyms, which could have been used. Share thoughts on the sessions.

Session 10: Students verbalise what they do when they paraphrase. Each child reads a paragraph and has an attempt at paraphrasing the paragraph, writing it down and then sharing it with the group. Discuss whether the meaning was retained. Discuss what they have learnt over the 10 sessions and how they can use paraphrasing to assist them when they read.

See Appendix 1. For detailed lesson plans.

Results

Results of the Pre-Testing and Post-Testing for both the intervention and control group are set out in Table 1.

Name	Intervention I or Control Group C	Paraphrasing Pre-test	Paraphrasing Post-test	Torch Raw Pre-test	Torch Raw Post-test	Torch Score Pre-test	Torch score Post-test	Synonyms Pre-test	Synonyms Post-test
Student A	I	2	36	5	19	23.4	56.5	7	27
Student B	I	0	23	5	19	23.4	56.5	22	35
Student C	I	1	33	3	20	18.2	63.9	9	31
Student D	I	1	21	4	19	21.0	56.5	4	18
Student E	C	0	0	3	3	18.2	18.2	5	12
Student F	C	11	18	13	14	38.2	40.2	27	40
Student G	C	2	6	8	8	29.2	29.2	21	18
Student H	C	0	1	5	4	23.4	21.0	11	12

Table 1.

Results support the hypothesis that teaching year 3 /4 students to use synonyms to assist in paraphrasing will increase their reading comprehension. All children in the Intervention group improved significantly in the paraphrasing and synonyms post-tests, and subsequently achieved a very high level in their reading comprehension post-tests. Only one student in the Control Group had significantly higher scores in the pre-tests than the Intervention group, and although Student F showed improvement in all post-tests, her post-test scores in the paraphrasing test and reading comprehension test were below those of the Intervention group. It was only in the synonyms post-test that Student F outscored all other students, although all students in the Intervention Group improved by an equal or greater margin than Student F. The pre and post- tests were all conducted in a group situation where children had to write the answers rather than say them as in an individual testing situation. It is possible that this may have impacted on the pre-test results of both the Intervention Group and the Control group as the children became restless due to the difficulty and

length of the tasks, particularly the paraphrasing and reading comprehension tasks. In the post-test, the Intervention Group were eager to show their improvement and commented aloud during the tests how much easier they were, compared to the first time they did the tests as a pre-test, and as a result, they were more focused. Other than Student F who did not have great difficulty with the task, the Control group were still restless and quite disinterested during the post-tests.

Neither group found the synonyms pre or post-test such an arduous task due to the nature of the test and were more focused while completing it.

Due to the huge improvement in the Torch test scores of the Intervention Group a follow up Torch test with that group only, was conducted two weeks after the completion of the post-testing to determine what skills they had retained and were able to apply.

The children in the Intervention Group increased in confidence with each teaching session and were eager to come to each session, asking every time they saw me when I was going to work with them and often presenting me with work they had done at home because they wanted to. The children's self-efficacy improved greatly over the sessions as they achieved success and were able to articulate what they were doing and how it was helping them.

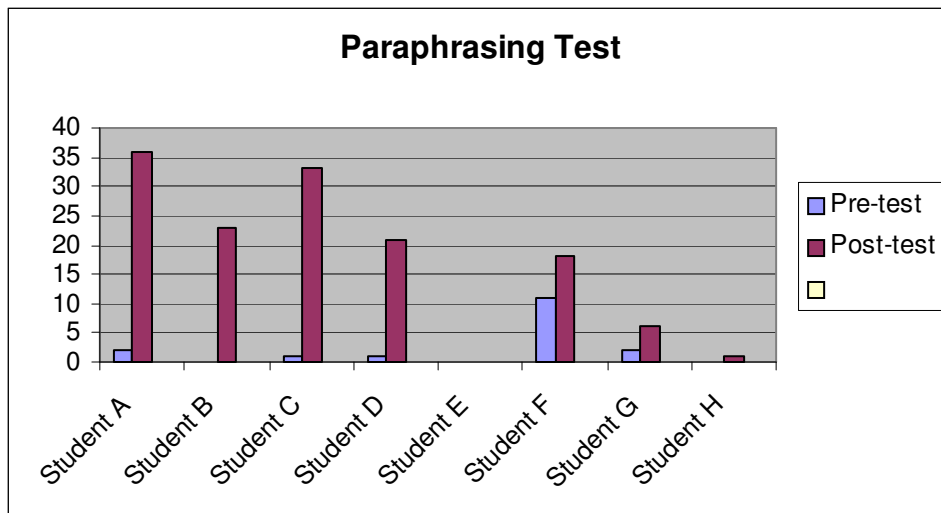


Figure 1.

Figure 1. Indicates that all students other than Student F found the concept of paraphrasing very difficult when pre-tested. The students were given a series of sentences from John Munro's Paraphrasing Test (2005) and were marked on the number of synonyms they used in their paraphrase. In the Intervention Group, Pre-test, Student A was able to use two synonyms, Student B was unable to use any and Students C and D each used one.

In the Control Group, Student E and H were unable to use a synonym, Student F was able to use 11 synonyms to paraphrase and Student G, two.

The post-test results show there was dramatic improvement from all students in the Intervention Group, with these students showing on average, an improvement of twenty-seven synonyms as compared to an average improvement of three synonyms from the control group. Student A showed an improvement of 34 words, Student B improved by 23, Student C by 32 and Student D by 20. Student D initially found the concept of a synonym quite difficult for the first couple of lessons, usually giving words of opposite meaning instead. It is possible this may in fact have helped the other students in the Intervention group as they constantly corrected Student D, reinforcing their own understanding of what a synonym is.

In the Control Group, Student E showed no improvement at all and was still unable to supply a synonym to paraphrase. Student F showed an improvement of 7 words, Student G showed an improvement of 4 words and Student H went from 1 word to 2. The students in the Intervention group moved from almost no understanding of paraphrasing to being able to articulate synonyms for words within their vocabulary.

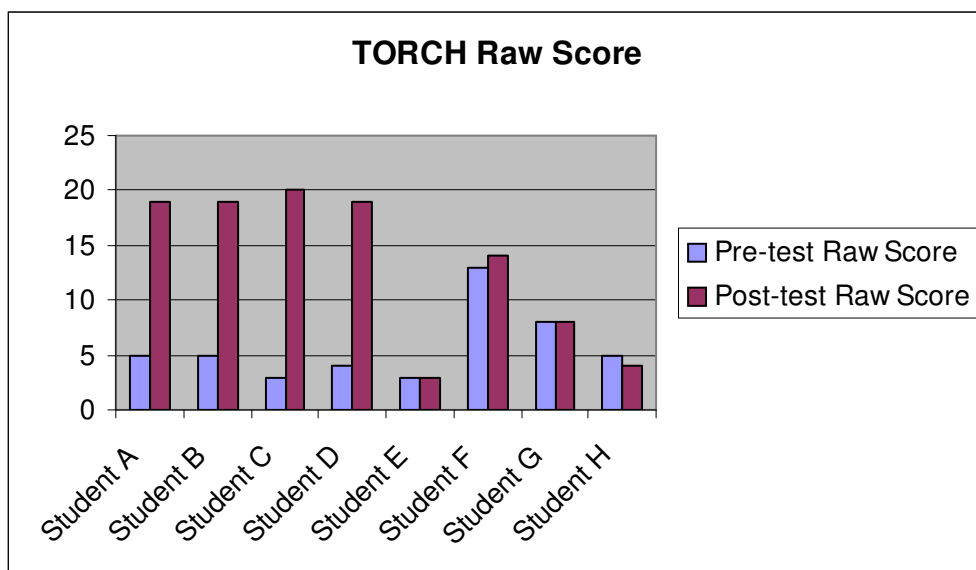


Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the pre and post test scores for both the intervention group and the control group. The TORCH test used was Lizards Love Eggs. Students A and B scored 5 correct responses in the pre-test, putting Student A in the 17th percentile rank for her year level and Student B in the 4th percentile rank for Grade 4 level. Student C scored 3 correct responses in the pre-test, putting her at the 9th percentile rank for her grade level, while Student D scored 4 correct responses putting her at the 13th percentile rank for her grade. Student E scored 3 correct responses in the pre-test and post-test, putting him in the 9th percentile rank for his grade level. Student F scored 13 correct responses in the pre-test putting her in the 60th percentile rank for her grade level, and 14 correct responses in the post-test, putting her in the 67th percentile rank.

Student G scored 8 correct responses in both the pre and post-tests, putting her in the 12th percentile rank for her grade level. Student H scored 5 correct responses in the pre-test, putting her in the 17th percentile rank for her grade level. In the post-test, Student H only scored 4 correct responses, putting her in the 13th percentile rank.

These results show there was little or no movement in the comprehension level of the students in the Control Group, with two students, Students E and G scoring exactly the same marks in both tests, Student F scoring one more mark and Student H scoring one less mark. The students in the Intervention Group all showed dramatic improvement in their Torch scores from the pre-test to the post-test. Student A scored 19 correct responses in her post-test, putting her in the 96th percentile rank. Student B also scored 19 correct responses in her post-test, putting her in the 91st percentile rank for Grade 4. Student C scored 20 correct responses in the post-test, putting her in the 99th percentile rank and Student D scored 19 correct responses, putting her in the 96th percentile rank for her grade level.

The average Torch score of the Intervention Group in the pre-test was 21.5 as compared to the Control Group which was slightly higher at 22.2, whereas the average Torch score of the Intervention Group in the post-test was 60.6 as compared to the Control Group post-test which was 27.2. These results most definitely support the hypothesis that the teaching of synonyms to assist in paraphrasing improves the reading comprehension level of students with reading difficulties.

Due to the fact the Intervention group improved so dramatically the Torch test was borrowed from a neighbouring school and the next test within the 3 /4 level was administered to the Intervention Group only. The test was administered almost two weeks after last working with the children. This was a deliberate action, to ascertain

how much the children had retained and were able to apply. The results of the second post-test using the Torch Test At the Zoo are in Figure 3.

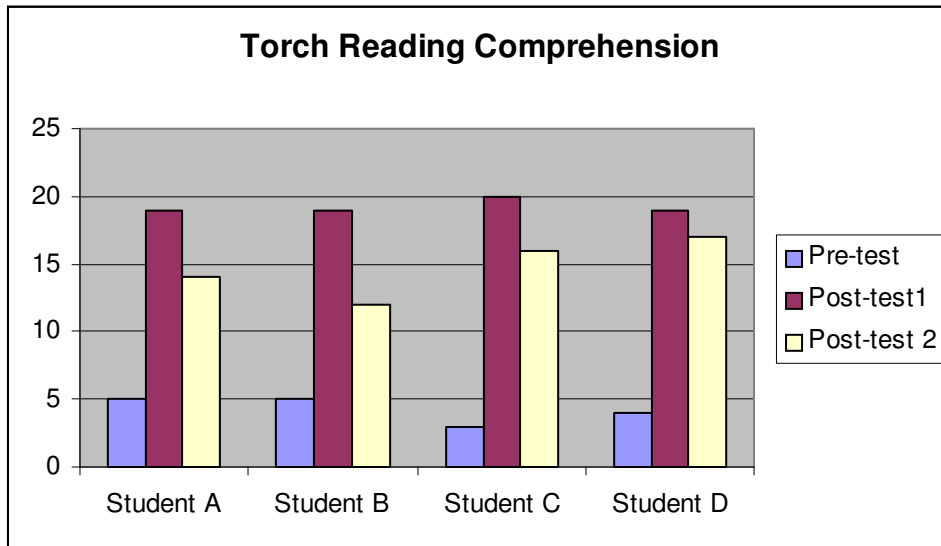


Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows the Intervention Groups initial pre-test results, their post-test results, indicated by Post-test 1 and the second post-test, indicated by Post-test 2.

Results of the second post-test show that although the children did not get as high a mark as the first post-test, they still achieved significantly better results than in their pre-tests and therefore, is evidence that they were able to retain and apply some of what they had learned. The second Torch post-test, At the Zoo was slightly more difficult than the first. Student A scored 14 correct responses, putting her in the 76th percentile rank for her grade. Student B scored 12 correct responses, putting her in the 42nd percentile rank for Grade 4. Student C scored 16 correct responses, putting her in the 87th percentile rank for her grade level and Student D scored 17 correct responses, putting her in the 91st percentile rank. Only Student B performed below standard for her grade level in the second post-test, although results show that she has still improved significantly from the pre-test and support the hypothesis that the

strategic teaching of synonyms to assist in paraphrasing improves the reading comprehension level of students with reading difficulties.

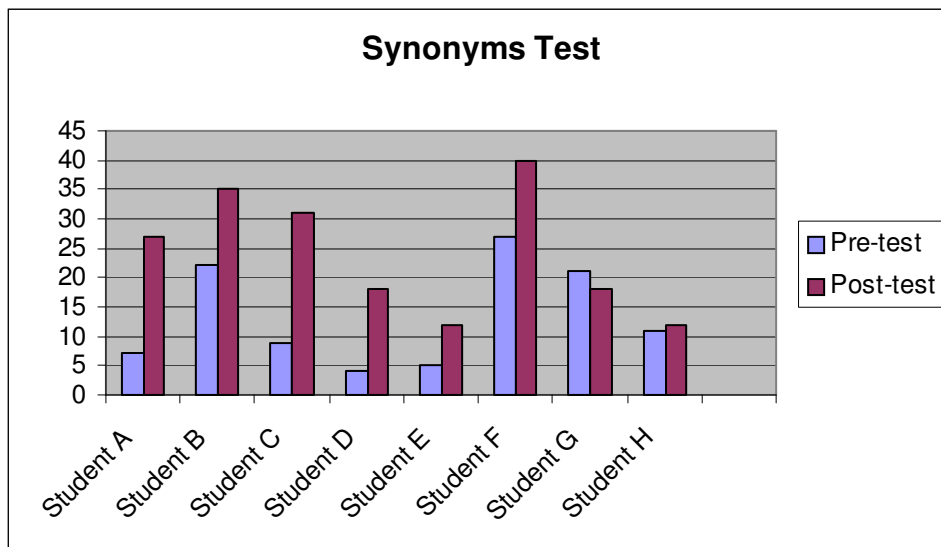


Figure 4.

Figure 4. Shows that all children were able to write some synonyms in the pre-test, with Student B, Student F and Student G writing significantly more than the other students. In the pre-test, the Intervention Group were able to write an average of 10.2 synonyms as compared to the Control Group who wrote an average of 16 synonyms. In the post-test, the students in the Intervention Group were able to write an average of 27.8 synonyms as compared to Control Group who wrote an average of 20.4 synonyms.

The post- test results show that the performance of all students in the Intervention Group improved considerably. Student A was able to write 20 more synonyms, Student B, 13, Student C, 22 and Student D, 14. Three of the student in the Control Group also improved, with only one, Student G, writing fewer synonyms in the post-test. Student E wrote 7 more synonyms, Student F, 13, Student G wrote 3 less and Student H improved by 1. Although Student F was able to write the most number of synonyms, her level of improvement was equalled by Student B and surpassed by Students A, C and D. The children in the Intervention Group were able to provide a

much greater number of synonyms in the post-test but only for words within their vocabulary.

The results of all pre-test show that Student F was at a much higher standard than any of the other students in the Intervention Group or Control Group. The children in both the Control Group and Intervention Group were referred on the basis that they were seen to be at-risk children in the classroom, particularly in the area of literacy and reading comprehension. Student F's classroom teacher was very surprised at the results as Student F is an extremely quiet child, who often presents as having difficulties and in no way displays her capabilities in her every day work.

Discussion

The results of this study support the hypothesis that the teaching of synonyms to assist in paraphrasing improves the reading comprehension level of grade 3 /4 students. All students improved in the use of synonyms and paraphrasing and demonstrated significant gains in reading comprehension. These results support the work of Harris and Sipay (1990), Katims and Harris (1997), Parker, Hasbrouck & Denton (2002) and Fisk and Hurst (2003) who suggest that teaching paraphrasing will improve the reading comprehension level of students.

The children in the Intervention group made significant gains in the use of synonyms over the sessions, which may be a key factor in the improvement in their ability to paraphrase. In the initial few sessions, Student D found the concept of synonyms quite difficult, instead providing opposites for the key words. Students A, B and C

understood the concept of a synonym and were able to match synonyms within the game quite easily, but initially found it difficult to provide their own synonyms for key words in a text. The key to developing the students' ability to provide their own synonyms was through oral discussion. It became a contest for the students to be the first to come up with a synonym for the key words, which were underlined. Their use of synonyms for words within their vocabulary developed quickly from session two onwards. Students A, B and C reminded Student D that a synonym was a word that meant the same thing, each time she gave a word of opposite meaning, reinforcing their understanding and also reminding her. By the end of session 3, Student D started to really understand the concept of a synonym and left a list of key words and synonyms on my desk the following day, from work that she had wanted to do at home. Her self-confidence started to improve considerably and the difference in her attitude and enthusiasm was incredible by the end of the last session. Student D has great difficulties remaining focused on any tasks for even a few minutes both in the classroom and in a small group situation and as a result rarely achieves success. Once she understood the concept of a synonym and realised that she could do the work the other children were doing there was no stopping her willingness to contribute to discussions and complete extra work at home.

The students' ability to provide synonyms for key words enabled them to have the ability to paraphrase. Initially the students were taught to break a sentence into meaningful parts, underline key words and provide synonyms for these words. They then linked the synonyms into a sentence and checked that the meaning was maintained. The children adapted quickly to paraphrasing a single sentence after their initial lessons on synonyms, as they quickly became confident using synonyms and

were all keenly finding synonyms in books during silent reading at school and at home, thus reinforcing and developing this skill constantly. The students became adept at saying what they were doing as they worked through the steps to paraphrase and how it was helping them and once again, this reinforced the concept and became a step-by-step checklist for the students. Over the sessions, much oral discussion took place prior to the children having individual attempts at paraphrasing, giving them the confidence to have a go and experience success. The children built up to paraphrasing two sentences and finally a small paragraph. The texts used in the sessions were at a level all students could comfortably decode, therefore allowing them to concentrate on gaining meaning from the text and finding synonyms for words within their experience and vocabulary. The evaluation of each others attempts at paraphrasing was an invaluable part of the latter lessons, as it gave children the opportunity to articulate why they thought one person's re-tell was more accurate than the others and thus reinforced the linking of new concepts with what they already knew.

In the Torch reading comprehension pre-test, the students in both the Intervention Group and Control Group, other than Student F, had great difficulty with the task due to the large volume of reading required. The students were overwhelmed by a whole page of text as well as the cloze exercise and found it difficult to keep track of where they were up to. The children became very frustrated and soon gave up on the task. After the pre-test, a discussion took place on how the children felt when they had a whole page of reading to do and they all agreed it was confusing and they couldn't find where they were up to. It was suggested that they cross out or cover the parts they have read, so as to keep track more easily of where they were up to. In the post-

test, three of the children in the Intervention Group crossed out the test as they read it and filled in the corresponding cloze answer, commenting that it was much easier to know where they were up to. Only Student B from the Intervention Group, worked through the post-test without crossing out as she went. No student from the Control Group used this strategy. The results of the reading comprehension post-testing, show that the use of synonyms, paraphrasing and the strategy of covering or crossing out to assist in keeping track of where they were up to, certainly assisted in improving the reading comprehension level of the students in the Intervention Group.

Although Student B did not show as great an improvement as the other students within the Intervention Group in the second post-test, it should be noted that she worked much more independently on all post-tests than the other students in the Intervention Group. No assistance was given to any student on the actual testing tasks, however an enormous amount of time was spent trying to keep Student D focused on her tasks, due to her limited concentration span. Students A and C also were constantly looking for reassurance throughout the post-tests, still lacking the confidence to be independent workers. Due to her independence, it is likely that Student B would transfer her learnings to a classroom situation much more readily than the other students in the Intervention Group.

The attitude and enthusiasm of the students in the Intervention Group should be noted. The students loved being withdrawn in a small group situation and the gain in confidence in all students over the sessions was enormous. The children could all see the improvement they were making and were very eager to 'show how clever they were', producing lists of synonyms they had found while reading at home and requesting further sessions every time they saw me. Previous research indicates that

reading strategy instruction creates more positive attitudes about reading and can improve achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield 1997; Oka & Paris, 1987; Stevens, 1988; cited in McCrudden et al. 2005). This was certainly evident with this particular group of students who grew in confidence as they achieved success each session, resulting in engagement and persistence and a desire to succeed. In the initial pre-tests, all children in the both the Intervention Group and Control Group, other than Student F, had great difficulty remaining focused on the tests and did not persist when the task became too difficult. In contrast, in the post-testing, the students in the Intervention Group were keen to demonstrate how much they had improved and showed persistence and effort to complete the work to the best of their ability. Comments made during the post-testing by all students indicated they found the test much easier as compared to the pre-testing. Wade, Buxton & Kelly (1999) cited in McCrudden et al. (2005) note that 'students who are interested in a task are more likely to use effective learning strategies such as elaboration of ideas, which in turn increases cognitive engagement and promotes understanding.'

One important factor that stood out while conducting this study and is an implication for teaching practice, is the importance of discussing a text before reading it to ascertain meanings of the key words contained in the text. The post-testing of synonyms clearly showed the importance of this. Even though all children in the Intervention Group improved considerably in the number of synonyms they could supply in the post-test, there were still several words such as adolescent, liberate and fatigued that were not within the vocabulary of these students and therefore it was impossible for them to supply a synonym for these words. This is an extremely important implication for teachers and stresses just how important it is to talk in depth

about a text and the meanings of unfamiliar words if the children are to have any chance of comprehending what they are reading.

Future research may study the effect of the teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing to a whole class rather than a small group as in this project. Future research may also study the effect that the combined use of reciprocal reading along with synonyms and paraphrasing has on the reading comprehension level of students. Reciprocal reading is a strategy used for improving reading comprehension where students have the opportunity to predict what the book or text may be about after reading the title or sub-heading, clarify the meaning of any unfamiliar words or pronunciations of these words, question anything about the text, and then summarise what they have read. The clarifying stage of reciprocal reading would ensure that children have a clear understanding of the vocabulary within the text, therefore, enabling them to use synonyms for key words and paraphrase. It would be interesting to note the effect that the combined use of the three would have on the comprehension level of students.

Working with the children in the Intervention Group was an extremely rewarding experience for both the children and myself and we will continue to meet at least once a week in order to make the transition from a small group experience, to being able to maintain their self-efficacy as they independently apply their newly learned skills to a classroom situation.

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Appendix 1

The following lessons were undertaken with a group of four Grade 3 /4 students. The students were withdrawn and had three to four 30- minute sessions per week.

Lesson 1

Teach Synonyms:

- Discuss what a synonym is.
- Ask children to suggest synonyms for words such as little and big. List on a chart.
- Play teacher devised synonym-matching game from words taken from the groups' guided reading text 'Shosun's Mistake' by John Lockyer. (Level 23)
- Hand out an equal number of words to each child. The matching synonym for each word is spread out on the floor. Children take turns to find the matching synonym for their words. Each child takes turns to read aloud the word and the synonym. Teacher lists on chart. (Hurried-rushed, track-path, yell-shout, faster-quicker, hurry-rush, looking-gazing, afraid-scared, shouted-yelled, jumped-leaped, woods-forest, ask-question, strange-odd, harm-hurt, started-began, blur-fuzz, help-assist)
- Group discusses any further words, which can be added to these synonyms eg: afraid- scared, frightened

Lesson 2

- Revise synonyms from lesson 1. Add any other synonyms that children have thought of to the chart.
- Teacher presents a sentence from the text from Lesson 1 to the children with the sentence segmented into meaningful parts.
- As a group, the children come up with some synonyms for each of the parts. 'Paulo / hurried / along the track
- Have the children link the synonyms into a statement and say the synonyms in a sentence. Eg: Paulo rushed down the path.
- Check that it means the same as the original sentence.
- Repeat these steps with another sentence from the text.
- Ask children to try to find some synonyms in books they are reading during silent reading time.

Lesson 3

- Share any synonyms children have come up with from silent reading. List on synonyms chart.
- Teacher presents children with a small paragraph from the text with a number of words underlined.
- As a group the children list some synonyms that can be used to replace the underlined words.
- Take one of these sentences at a time and segment it into meaningful parts.

- As a group, have children link the synonyms into a sentence. Ask children to work out how they can say the sentence another way so that it means the same thing,
- Check that it retains the meaning of the original sentence.
- Discuss the steps used: - Read the sentence
Break it into meaningful parts
Write synonyms for as many words as possible
Say the sentence another way so it means the same thing
- Repeat these steps with the following sentences in the paragraph.

Lesson 4

- Teacher presents children with a small paragraph from the text with a number of words underlined.
- Individually, children list some synonyms that can be used to replace the underlined words.
- Share them with the group; discuss whether the word fits with the meaning of the text and list on a chart.
- Take one sentence at a time and as a group break it into meaningful parts.
- Individually, have children link the synonyms into a sentence. Ask children to say the sentence another way so that it means the same thing.
- Share sentences and discuss whether each sentence retains the same meaning as the original sentence.
- Have children explain what they did when they paraphrased and comment on how it helps them read better.

Lesson 5

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.
- Using the group's guided reading text, 'What a Haircut!' by Patricia Gray, (Level 23), take turns or reading aloud a short passage.
- Give children a different sentence each and ask them to use the following steps to paraphrase. – Read the sentence again

Break it into meaningful parts

Write synonyms for as many words as possible

Say it another way so that it means the same thing

- Ask each child to write the paraphrase of their sentence.
- Each child takes turns to read their original sentence and then their paraphrased attempt.
- Discuss as a group each sentence retained the original meaning.
- Children share their thoughts on today's lesson. Was it helpful? Why? How can you use it in the classroom?

Lesson 6

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.
- Using the group's guided reading text, 'What a Haircut!' by Patricia Gray, (Level 23), take turns or reading aloud a different passage from Lesson 5.
- Give children a different sentence each and ask them to use the following steps to paraphrase. – Read the sentence again

Break it into meaningful parts

Write synonyms for as many words as possible

Say it another way so that it means the same thing

- Ask each child to write the paraphrase of their sentence.
 - Each child takes turns to read their original sentence and then their paraphrased attempt.
 - Discuss as a group whether each sentence retained the original meaning.
 - Children share their thoughts on today's lesson. Was it helpful? Why? How can you use it in the classroom?
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Lesson 7

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.
- Hand out a 'Challenge Sheet' to children. They have to paraphrase 5 sentences individually and then share it with the group.
- Each child takes turns to read its paraphrased sentence.
- As a group decide which is the closest in meaning to the original sentence.
- Repeat with the remaining sentences.
- Children share their thoughts on the lesson. Today I learnt... found...

Lesson 8

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.
- Using the group's guided reading text, 'Frank and Sam's Summer at Aramoana', (Level 25), take turns or reading aloud a short passage
- Give each child two sentences and ask them to use the following steps to paraphrase. – Read the sentences again

Break it into meaningful parts

Write synonyms for as many words as possible

Say it another way so that it means the same thing

- Ask each child to write the paraphrase of their sentences.
- Each child takes turns to read their original sentences and then their paraphrased sentences.
- Discuss as a group the sentences and decide whether the meaning was retained. Were there any other synonyms that could have been used?
- Share thoughts on their learning and how they have been using paraphrasing in the classroom.

Lesson 9

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.'
- Using the group's guided reading text, 'Frank and Sam's Summer at Aramoana', (Level 25), take turns or reading aloud a short passage
- Give each child two sentences and ask them to use the following steps to paraphrase. – Read the sentences again

Break it into meaningful parts

Write synonyms for as many words as possible

Say it another way so that it means the same thing

- Ask each child to write the paraphrase of their sentences.
- Each child takes turns to read their original sentences and then their paraphrased sentences.
- Discuss as a group the sentences and decide whether the meaning was retained. Were there any other synonyms that could have been used?
- Share thoughts on their learning and how they have been using paraphrasing in the classroom.

Lesson 10

- Have students begin by sharing what they do when they paraphrase. Eg: 'I will read the sentence, break the sentence into parts, write synonyms for as many words as I can and then say it another way so that it means the same thing.'
- Using the group's guided reading text, 'Frank and Sam's Summer at Aramoana', (Level 25), take turns or reading aloud a few pages.
- Give each child a paragraph and ask them to use the following steps to paraphrase. – Read the sentences again

Break it into meaningful parts

Write synonyms for as many words as possible

Say it another way so it means the same thing

- Ask each child to write the paraphrase of their paragraph.
- Each child reads their original paragraph and then their paraphrasing of the paragraph.
- Discuss as a group whether the meaning was retained.
- Share thoughts on their learning of paraphrasing and discuss how they can use paraphrasing to assist them when they read.