

## Explicit strategic instruction in paraphrasing with a particular focus on the use of synonyms will improve comprehension.

### **Abstract**

As students reach the upper levels of their primary education, there is a greater demand for them to be self directed learners. They are exposed to a wide variety of multimodal texts and are required to demonstrate effective comprehension strategies to successfully access various texts with which they need to summarise, evaluate, review and respond.

Many of these students experience difficulties in comprehension even though they are good text decoders. These students often exhibit a degree of accuracy in word recognition, however when asked to retell, summarise or answer questions related to what they have read, often demonstrate a lack of understanding of the text. A possible factor that may contribute to this could be caused by being exposed to more challenging text with richer and more extensive vocabulary of which they may be unfamiliar.

The hypothesis of this study is that teaching Year Five underachieving students who are competent text decoders but have difficulty in comprehension, to utilise synonyms and paraphrase text increases their reading comprehension. Research indicates that the strategic instruction in the use of comprehension strategies improves overall comprehension.

Four Year Five boys who demonstrated difficulty in retelling and comprehending text were chosen to participate in a series of 12 teaching sessions where they were explicitly taught to use synonyms and the paraphrasing strategy.

Results indicate support for the hypothesis as the comprehension scores of all students within the group indicated some improvement. Monitoring of the use of synonyms during the teaching sessions, along with post test results of students' paraphrasing indicated marked improvement by all students in the group.

Outcomes suggest that teaching the use of synonyms and paraphrasing text is a successful strategy and should be explicitly taught to assist students to improve their reading comprehension ability.

## Introduction

'Reading is a complex, multifaceted process that begins and ends with meaning. In response to the demands of a text, the reader draws on both cognitive and linguistic strategies as well as a range of information – inside and outside – the text – to process continuous print with understanding' (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Many students by the time they reach the upper levels in primary school are able to read fluently at an accurate rate, with good fluency and expression. However, the difficulty can often lie in retelling what has been read and answering questions about the text.

Comprehension is the central focus of reading. It is the ability to construct meaning from text. By understanding what they have read, students are better able to remember, communicate and apply the information they have gained through reading. Even in the early stages of reading acquisition, students should develop as critical readers by discussing, reflecting, asking and answering questions about what they have read or has been read to them.

As students reach the late levels of primary education and venture into secondary, the demands of comprehension are increased as they are 'required to learn by reading in the various KLAS'. (Munro, 2002) Students are required to not only read texts that increase in difficulty but also with varied structures, organisation and subject matter and use higher order thinking to process what they have read. Combine this with the model of 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary learning where the focus is for students to become self directed and self managed learners, as the need to access a variety of information sources increases. This then poses difficulties for students who struggle with making the connection with written information and transferring it to knowledge. If students are experiencing difficulty comprehending text, the consequence is that 'they are less able to align what they know about a topic with related written text' (Munro, 2002).

Reading requires a sustained cognitive effort on the part of the reader and has been described by Rubin (2000 as cited in Westwood, 2001, p10) as a 'complex intellectual process involving a number of abilities'. As such, Pressley (1999) as cited in Westwood (2001, p10) suggests that good comprehenders are effective users of comprehension strategies when they work with text. Learning strategies can be defined as 'techniques, principles, or routines that enable students to learn to solve problems and complete tasks independently. A strategy is an individual's approach to a task, including how a student thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes'(Katims et al,1997). For educators, one of the priorities for teaching students with reading difficulties should be to provide a range of strategies to enable students to extract meaning from texts as well as opportunities in which these can be practiced so they can be used spontaneously and selectively. Research supports the fact that we should aim to develop strategic readers who are able to use their metacognition to regulate their reading.

Effective strategy instruction involves the teacher to explicitly model the strategy, cue the students to use the strategy and to scaffold the instruction to finally allow for gradual release, enabling the student to become independent. Such explicit teaching of the strategy instruction identifies for the students each step involved and why these are important in order for the task to be completed. This also reinforces the metacognitive process by teaching the 'why' and 'how' of the strategy therefore allowing the responsibility to shift from the teacher to the student. 'Fluent use of a strategy is critical because it allows students to use the strategy without taxing their working memory'. (Hagaman, 2010)

There have been over the years, a variety of strategies that have been proposed to assist in comprehension, all with varying degrees of effectiveness. The Paraphrasing Strategy developed by Schumaker, Denton & Deshler (1984) has been found to increase reading comprehension in a multi-step cognitive approach with the goal of increasing comprehension. This particular strategy has proven to be easily incorporated into the classroom as it reinforces the skills of 'identifying the main ideas, finding supporting details, and identifying the author's voice' (Fisk & Hurst, 2003). Paraphrasing simply is putting the content of what has been read into one's own words.

Paraphrasing has been seen to be effective as it encourages the reader to make meaningful links by making connections to prior knowledge and to use known vocabulary related to the topic. According to Kintsch (1998), 'it helps the reader establish retrieval cues that enable integration of what is previously known with what is being read' which is an important aspect of comprehension. Fisk and Hurst (2003) also state that one of the reasons that 'paraphrasing works so well is that it integrates all the modes of communication – reading, writing, listening and speaking – which leads to a deeper understanding of the text'.

The paraphrasing strategy developed by Schumaker et al., (1984) contains the acronym RAP. In using this acronym, students learn to-

**R**ead the sentence/paragraph.

**A**sk yourself questions about the main ideas and details in the sentence/paragraph.

**P**ut the main ideas and details into your own words.

The use of the acronym is a 'metacognitive technique common to the Strategic Instruction Model' (Katims et al.,1997) and as such are 'taught to students to trigger or activate their inner, cognitive dialogues and then have them think about and actively apply the steps in a particular strategy'. With the introduction of the RAP paraphrasing strategy, the use of the acronym, assists in developing self talk for the students in that it serves as a reminder to keep talking to themselves as a way to improve their comprehension.

Apart from students developing a self script through the improvement of the metacognition, it has been stated by Munro (2005) that paraphrasing assists students to not only comprehend what they are reading but to engage in the text. In doing so, this allows students to link new ideas with what they know and to understand complex sentences, therefore enabling them to talk about the ideas in the topic. As such, the opportunity to build and reinforce new vocabulary is developed and this allows the individual to retain related ideas in their short term memory.

A strong component inherent in this whole process is the use, development and reinforcement of oral language. Almasi and Gambrell (1997, as cited in Fisk and Hurst, 2003) found that 'providing opportunities for students to interact with one another and to challenge others' ideas during discussion supports higher-level thinking'. A view also held by Harvey and Goudvis (2000) as cited in Fisk and Hurst (2003) is that 'opportunities for peer discussion and response build community and enhance understanding for all kids in the class'. Throughout the process, self management is supported through the verbalisation of the strategy, (What do I do as I read?) and the discussion and collaboration that takes place.

'Changing a student's attitude towards a task and success are important goals of strategy instruction'. (Hagaman et al., 2010) Often underachieving students have a lot of negative self talk and a negative view of themselves and their capabilities. Providing strategic instruction and support enables the student to develop their self belief and enables them to access various strategies independently, which in turn, allows them to achieve success and increase their self efficacy.

With this in mind, this investigation aims to confirm the various research studied by providing explicit strategic instruction in paraphrasing with a particular focus on the use of synonyms will show an improvement in comprehension.

## **Prediction**

Explicitly teach Year Five underachieving readers to paraphrase using synonyms, improves reading comprehension.

## **Method**

This investigation used an OXO design in which the gain in reading comprehension accuracy following the explicit teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing is monitored for Year Five underachieving students with poor comprehension of text. Lesson procedures were modeled on Munro's Comprehension Intervention format for Paraphrasing as well as teacher designed lessons.

Students were assessed at pre-test using the following:

1. Progressive Achievement Test – Reading (PAT-R) Comprehension – Test Booklet 5 (ACER)
2. Paraphrasing Task – Individual Administration ( J Munro)
3. Synonym Task – Group Administration (J Munro)
4. Self Efficacy Questionnaire (J Munro)

Students were assessed at post-test using the following:

1. Progressive Achievement Test – Reading (PAT-R) Comprehension – Test Booklet 5 (ACER)
2. Paraphrasing Task – Individual Administration (J Munro)
3. Synonym Task- Group Administration (J Munro)
4. Self Efficacy Questionnaire (J Munro)

Scoring of the PAT-R Test was completed as instructed in the Administration Manual and the other tasks were scored according to the guidelines outlined by John Munro for both pre and post tests.

During the instructional sessions, students were taught the strategy of paraphrasing through the development of knowledge, the use of synonyms, and verbalising the process, (how and why). Oral language was a crucial component within these sessions as participants were required to constantly verbalise their thinking process, the steps they undertook within the strategy and most importantly to reflect on their learning at the completion of the sessions.

## **Participants**

Candidates chosen to participate within this intervention are all current Year Five boys who have demonstrated limited comprehension of text. These students all reside within the same classroom and were withdrawn for group instruction during literacy activities conducted by their own classroom teacher. The students were chosen both from consultations with the classroom teacher and using the literacy data collected at the beginning of the year. The classroom teacher identified these students as those who would benefit most from additional assistance to work on strategies to assist them in understanding texts.

### **Student One**

Student A is 11.11 years of age and is the youngest of two children. It is his second year at the school and the third one he has attended since commencing his primary education. He was diagnosed with Perthes disease (a children's disease of the hips) when he was in Grade Prep and has undergone several surgeries to correct this and consequently missed several months of school. As a result, he repeated this year level. This combined with three school transfers has impacted on his skill development, particularly in the area of Literacy.

He feels 'good' about his learning in general and enjoys reading and admitted to reading more this year than ever before. He is able to decode simple text but has difficulty re-telling and comprehending what has been read, often confusing details. He also demonstrates an inability to integrate and consolidate ideas when reading. Although he is able to re-tell text spontaneously, he has difficulty specifically comprehending the main ideas. When reading he mostly reads word for word rather than reading in phrases and sentences. His reading is slow, at times laborious and mostly lacks fluency. This would impact on ideas being retained in his short-term memory. The beginning of the year literacy data identified this student with a reading age of 8.4 years (BURT) and a comprehension accuracy rate of 50% for his Probe test.

### **Student Two**

Student B is 10.9 years of age and is the youngest twin in a family of three siblings where English is not the first spoken language in the home. He admits that he lacks confidence in the area of literacy and believes that his strength lies in numeracy whilst his twin's strength is in literacy. He likes to read sometimes and often relies on his brother to help him with what he identifies as 'big' words. He believes that visualising what he reads assists him in understanding what he reads 'sometimes' and he would like to improve his ability to read expressively and fluently and to comprehend what he has read. The literacy assessments conducted at the beginning of the year indicated that he had a reading age of 7.6 years (BURT) and his comprehension accuracy rate of his Probe testing was 60%. He eagerly communicates and contributes willingly in literacy activities although his grasp of grammar is limited and he demonstrates difficulty when verbalising his thoughts often with insufficient detail, utilising incorrect tense or appropriate vocabulary.

### **Student Three**

Student C is 11.1 years of age and is the youngest of two children. He admits that he doesn't like to read and dislikes reading 'long' books as they have lots of words and that scares him. He indicated that he finds reading fluently difficult when there are 'big words' or when faced with words he is unsure of. He felt that he had trouble keeping ideas in his head when reading and was not confident in retelling what has been read. The literacy data collected at the beginning of the year indicated that he had a reading

age of 9.6 (BURT) and the comprehension of his Probe testing was 30%. He lacks confidence in his abilities and experiences difficulties when completing literacy tasks in the classroom. He is able to decode simple text but has difficulty in re-telling what he reads, often becoming confused with the detail. He can be easily distracted in the classroom and can at times be inattentive failing to apply himself consistently to tasks set. His belief in his ability to learn is low however, he expresses a desire to improve in all areas of his learning.

### Student Four

Student D is 11. 2 years old and is the eldest of three children. He likes to read but mainly reads factual texts and dislikes reading novels. He identified that he likes to visualise what he is reading and indicated that he only likes to read things that he understands. He also indicated that he doesn't like to read what he deems 'big words' as he feels he is unable to 'say or sound them out'. As a result, he feels this causes him to lose meaning when reading sentences. The literacy data collected for this student at the beginning of the year indicated that his reading age was 10.6 years (BURT) and his ability to accurately comprehend a Probe text was 40%.

**Table 1**

#### Participant's details

Name	Control=0 Teaching=1	Age in MONTHS	Gender 0=Male 1=Female	Years of Schooling	ESL No=0 Yes=1	LNSLN 0=SLD 1=ID 2=Asp	Earlier Intervention No=0 RR=1 Bridges=2 ERIK=3	Ob Survey/Letter ID	EMA No=0 Yes=1
A	1	143	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
B	1	129	0	6	1	0	0	0	0
C	1	133	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
D	1	134	0	6	0	0	0	0	0

This table represents further background information about the participants in this investigation. It indicates Student A as being the eldest having repeated a year level of his primary education and identifies Student B as having an ESL background.

## Materials

Materials used include the following:

- **PAT-R Test- Comprehension Test Booklet 5** used for both pre and post test to determine the student's ability to comprehend a variety of text types.
- **Synonym Task** (John Munro)
- **Paraphrasing Task** (John Munro)
- Personal interview questions (designed by teacher, **Appendix 1**)– to determine student's own perception of their strengths and weaknesses in their learning, in particular reading and the areas they identified as the most they would like to improve.(Pre test only as a 'getting to know you' indicator).
- **Self Efficacy Questionnaire** (John Munro) - to determine student's self belief in their abilities as readers and learners.
- How to chunk/segment sheet (John Munro)
- Chapter form Paul Jennings, 'Uncanny'- 'Spaghetti Pig-Out'- words from chapter used to introduce synonyms.
- Texts from Rigby Collections – used in teaching sessions to facilitate development of students' comprehension through the strategy of paraphrasing.
- Teaching Paraphrasing Strategy flow chart – (John Munro)
- Classroom materials – flashcards, whiteboard, chart paper, textas, student reflective journals, thesaurus.

## Procedure

Students were withdrawn from the classroom for the administration of the pre and post testing. Upon the collation and analysis of the pre-test information, students were withdrawn from their class to work together for approximately 45 minutes per session. These occurred mainly during the class' literacy time or another time negotiated by the students. The intervention ran over a period of four weeks and totaled 12 sessions.

From the information gained about the students, it was evident that before commencing the paraphrasing strategy, it was necessary to provide explicit teaching on the components contained within the strategy. An important factor within this research was making students think in ways they haven't thought before and to learn new actions more effectively. As such, for the sequence of lessons to be effective, it was of vital importance to prepare the students adequately for what they needed to learn. By providing understanding and knowledge of the key components, it enabled students to build on their existing knowledge as well as experience success.

Prior to the teaching of the paraphrasing strategy, it was necessary to provide these students with a purpose for the comprehension instruction. The first session began with discussing the importance and purpose of reading and the skills good readers



demonstrate. These ideas were listed on a chart and displayed and participants were encouraged to add and refer to this at any point during the sessions. A questioning chart was also developed by the group that was referred to as prompts effective readers used to formulate questions when reading a text (eg: Who were... Where did...). This was also prominently displayed and was added to as the sessions commenced. These charts assisted in supporting the students in developing their metacognition. **(Appendix 1)**

A reflective journal was introduced and modeled to the students with each having an individual copy. The purpose of this was to reflect on their learning from each session; to identify the action learnt, when it could be used and questions that they may still have. A feedback section was also included for the teacher, peer or parent to respond. **(Appendix 2)**

The second session began with determining a group definition for synonyms. This was explicitly taught by reading a chapter from Paul Jennings' book, 'Spaghetti Pig Out' and extracting unknown or unfamiliar words. Participants collectively provided various synonyms for these words and these were placed on flashcards and were used to play bingo, concentration or synonym races. This not only engaged the students but assisted in consolidating their understanding of synonyms as well as exposing them to richer vocabulary.

The third session focused on how to paraphrase by teaching the students how to think 'paraphrasing'. This was also explicitly taught to students utilising simple sentences and asking them to rephrase the sentence by changing as many words as possible without losing meaning. The key actions involved here was to assist students to identify the topic of the text, segment or chunk sentences into key ideas, suggest synonyms, link these synonyms into a proposition or relationship and finally, to check that the new sentence retained the same meaning as the initial sentence. Teaching the students how to segment or chunk a sentence into parts assisted them to recognise the meaningful units in which to re-word sentences. This was modeled to the group with sentences on the board from 'Spaghetti Pig-Out', before students worked in pairs to practice. Students then reinforced their understanding by completing a prepared on 'The Giant Panda' in which the left hand column contained the original sentence and they were required to match paraphrased sentences from the right hand column which were not in correct order. **(Appendix 4)** The purpose of this task was twofold; to monitor their ability to chunk and segment sentences and to determine their ability to correctly match the paraphrased sentence.

Once this was established, students in the following session were provided with a worksheet with various sentences. Their task was to work in pairs to reinforce their understanding of chunking and segmenting sentences and then to paraphrase each, changing as many words as possible without changing the meaning. **(Appendix 5)** A combination of one and two event sentences was included on this sheet.

Throughout all these lessons that were explicitly taught, oral language was a strong component. Students were constantly required to verbalise the process, their thinking and share their thoughts and ideas. They were encouraged to provide feedback on each other's paraphrased sentence and justify their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with answers which determined the accuracy of their paraphrasing. At the conclusion of each of these lessons, students reflected on their learning in their journal and set personal goals for themselves for the next session.

The next session began with the explicit instruction of 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the paraphrasing strategy. The mnemonic, RAP was introduced. (**Appendix 6**) This was modeled using various sentences from texts in the Rigby Collection, before students practiced in pairs, then individually. Each session concluded with the students orally reviewing the action taken therefore, developing a self script and then individually reflecting on their own learning in their journal.

The following sessions required the students to consolidate the use of the strategy, reviewing the steps involved in paraphrasing (RAP) and practicing the strategy through verbalisation. The definition for synonyms and how to chunk/segment sentences was continually reinforced prior to each lesson. This framework was used for paraphrasing sentences before graduating to paragraphs. Students were given the opportunity to work in pairs to implement the strategy in order to establish their understanding and the use of it. The sessions reinforced their use of oral language where students were encouraged to verbalise and practice the strategy, suggest synonyms for key content words, paraphrase a sentence listened to, question, make suggestions, provide feedback to each other, review the lesson and reflect on their learning. Appropriate feedback and support was provided and student action was monitored.

The remaining 7 sessions proceeded in the following manner:

- Review previous day's session
- Text retelling from previous session
- Getting Knowledge Ready (**GKR**) to orientate students to new text-Text reading
- Synonyms- Reading target words from new text. Teacher reads and students match orally with synonyms. Add suggestions to flashcards for games.
- Reading of new text
- Modeling of paraphrasing a sentence as a group from the text using the RAP strategy. Teacher writes, students provide suggestions orally
- Applying the RAP strategy - Writing new sentences in pairs, then individually
- Review and feedback to each other. Oral comprehension and retelling of text.
- Metacognition (orally)–What actions were used? What did I learn? When can I use it? How does putting sentences in my own words help me to understand what I have read?
- Reflecting on their own learning in journals.

At the conclusion of each session, student behaviours and progress was monitored in order to evaluate teaching effectiveness and to assist with planning for subsequent lessons.

## Results

At the commencement of this investigation, the students who participated all identified that they would like to improve their comprehension of texts and were eager to participate in the lessons. Protocols had to be established in the ways in which groups work effectively and expectations had to be set as their eagerness and enthusiasm resulted in them 'being silly' and not focused on the task. Student A was the least engaged throughout the lessons with distractions from home and being absent for two of the sessions. All students found the initial paraphrasing and synonym task difficult and were daunted by the length of the PAT-R test.

At the conclusion of the investigation, all students made gains in all areas assessed with Student A making the least gains overall and Student C and D making the most gains.

The results and collated data demonstrates an overall improvement for all students in the intervention group and support the hypothesis that teaching strategy instruction to students who are accurate text decoders to use paraphrasing and synonyms increases their reading comprehension.

### Table Two

#### PAT-R Test- Comprehension Test Booklet 5

Student	Pre test PAT-R	Post test PAT-R
A	17/34	18/34
B	14/34	20/34
C	14/34	17/34
D	25/34	27/34

The Progressive Achievement Test – Reading (PAT-R) Comprehension booklet is designed to assess the reading skills of readers. Each test booklet includes texts and items that match the general range ability of students in the target year level as indicated by the number on the booklet. The texts types contained in Booklet 5 are varied and include a short and a longer narrative, poster, recount, procedure, discussion, and a table.

Upon diagnosis of the results, the assessor is able to interpret the student's score in terms of the skills they possess and the types of tasks they can do successfully. The skills identified within Booklet 5 include retrieving directly stated information, reflecting on texts, interpreting explicit information and interpreting by making inferences. For the purpose of this investigation, the student's raw score was utilised which identifies the number of items the student answered correctly out of a possible 34 items.

The test was administered as a group and took approximately 45 minutes to complete. During the pre test, the students lacked concentration and had to be reminded to stay on task. Student A in particular was tired, emotional and distracted as an incident had occurred over the weekend that had negative effects on his demeanor on the day of testing. Unfortunately, the timetable would not allow testing on an alternate day for this student.

The data for this test indicates that whilst each student improved on their raw scores in the post test, the gains made are not as noticeable as hoped. Student A made the least improvement with a 3% increase in his comprehension ability whilst Student B made the most improvement with a 17% increase in his ability to comprehend the items contained in the test. All students found the tasks for the recount to be the easiest as all their scores increased in this item for the post test and all students found the task represented as a table the most difficult to comprehend as their score decreased in the post test.

The breakdown of the skills contained in the test booklet indicates varied results. Post test data demonstrate that Student A increased in his ability to retrieve directly stated information whilst Student B and C remained the same and Student D decreased slightly.

Student C & D remained the same with their ability to reflect on texts, whilst Student A decreased and Student B increased. The skill of interpreting explicit information from the text demonstrated the most gains with three of the students showing improvement and Student A remaining the same. However, Student A made the most gains in his post test with his ability to interpret information by making inferences.

**Table 3**

**Paraphrasing Task**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Pre test Paraphrasing</b>	<b>Post test Paraphrasing</b>
<b>A</b>	9/32	17/32
<b>B</b>	11/32	18/32
<b>C</b>	5/32	21/32
<b>D</b>	7/32	25/32

The paraphrasing task focused on determining the student's ability to retell sentences in their own words. It required them to listen to the sentence in the text, comprehend it and retell it substituting words in the sentence with synonyms all the while maintaining the meaning of the sentence. There were 17 sentences in all with a possible 2 points being awarded for each sentence that had been reworded and the student having substituted more than 50% of the words in the sentence using synonyms.

All students within the group found the pre assessment of this task to be difficult. Student A reworded 3 sentences word for word and added own phrases that weren't evident in the initial sentence. He also changed the meaning of some sentences by substituting incorrect synonyms. Student B also reworded some sentences word for word or provided answers that were not grammatically correct. Student C experienced the most difficulty and whilst he was able to complete the task, the majority of his answers did not maintain meaning and he often substituted words with antonyms. On several occasions, he added adjectives which altered the meaning of the initial sentence considerably. Student D was unable to answer five of the sentences, partially completed two and reworded two of the sentences. All four students had difficulty with sentences that contained more than one event with Student D failing to respond to them and the others rewording the sentences word for word.

At the completion of the intervention, there was a notable improvement with all students with Student C and D making the most gains, 50% and 56% respectively. As well as verbalising the paraphrasing strategy, they also utilised their knowledge of 'chunking' to assist in paraphrasing. All four of the students were better able to paraphrase sentences that contained more than one event even though less than 50% of the words were substituted with synonyms. The comparison of scores at post test, indicate that the explicit teaching of the paraphrasing strategy using synonyms had a marked effect on the students in the group.

**Table 4**

**Synonym Task**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Pre test Synonyms</b>	<b>Post test Synonyms</b>
<b>A</b>	28	30
<b>B</b>	44	53
<b>C</b>	27	38
<b>D</b>	22	45

This task was designed to evaluate the students understanding of synonyms by demonstrating their ability to recall a word that has the same meaning as another word. All students experienced difficulty with this task during the pre test and on numerous occasions responded with 'I'm not sure', 'I don't know' or ' I don't know what that word means' in relation to the target word. Student A drew upon his prior knowledge to assist with some words connecting the word 'release' by stating the synonym to be 'DVD release' and 'clean' as being '99.9%'. Student B resorted to using word families as synonyms in some cases while Student C interpreted some synonyms to be characteristics of words (eg: tiger – claws, scratches). Student D had the most difficulty omitting to answer 16 of the 30 questions.

The results at the completion of the intervention showed improvement with all students with Student D experiencing the most significant improvement. In many cases students were better able to provide more than one synonym for several of the words listed however, they were still unable to provide synonyms for the target words fatigued, liberate and adolescent in both the pre and post test.

**Table 5**

**Self Efficacy Questionnaire**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Self Efficacy Pre test</b>	<b>Self Efficacy Post test</b>
<b>A</b>	4/6	6/6
<b>B</b>	3/6	6/6
<b>C</b>	3/6	5/6
<b>D</b>	5/6	6/6

The Self Efficacy Questionnaire was designed to determine the student's self belief as readers and learners. It contains 12 questions on how students perceive themselves as readers and 6 questions on the strategies they use to assist when reading. The questions relating to the strategies used are allocated a point each with a possible total of 6. The higher the total score correlates to the higher the self efficacy of the student.

The students within the intervention group all demonstrated higher self efficacy scores in their post test. All students indicated at the conclusion of the intervention that they were more confident in understanding each sentence read, correcting any mistakes, remembering what happens in the story as it is being read and retelling the story after reading it.

Student D demonstrated the most improvement indicating a growth in his confidence in his own ability in 11 of the 12 questions on the questionnaire. His belief in being able to read fast enough to keep ideas in his mind was the only area he felt less confident. Student B's results indicate that whilst his self efficacy increased, he felt less confident in the post test in answering questions about the story and remembering words read lots of times already. Self efficacy for both Students A and C also improved but both felt less confident in putting together ideas in the story.

## **Discussion**

The focus of this investigation was to explicitly teach Year Five underachieving readers to paraphrase using synonyms, improves reading comprehension. Analysis of the results at the completion of this series of lessons supports the initial hypothesis.

Students improved in the use of synonyms and paraphrasing and demonstrated some gains in reading comprehension and with their self efficacy. Whilst this intervention indicates positive results, it implies that further reinforcement is needed to achieve better results. The marked improvement in the synonym and paraphrasing tests lend support to the fact that strategic instruction helps readers better understand what they read. The variance in the progress made by each student could also indicate the level of instruction and scaffolding needed for each student to progress differs and may need to be adapted through the monitoring and evaluation of each lesson.

The limited progress made with the comprehension pre and post test score can also be attributed to the overall duration of the instruction given. During the explicit teaching sessions, students were able to demonstrate their understanding and effective use of the strategy but results obtained, indicate that students were unable to competently transfer this knowledge efficiently when completing the post test. Schumaker et al., (1984) lends support to this by stating in their study that 'the more paraphrasing a student did, the higher his or her comprehension scores'.

It was noted that as the series of lessons progressed, the students' ability to verbalise the strategy improved along with the quality of their oral language. Initially, the students found it difficult to generate synonyms but as the sessions progressed, their ability to provide suitable and appropriate synonyms to assist in paraphrasing of text increased, as with the widening of vocabulary knowledge. Analysis of testing results indicate students' overall ability to literally comprehend text improved as well as the ability to spontaneously paraphrase text substituting appropriate synonyms. It was also noted that during the sessions, the student's ability to include details and events in the re-tell improved which further demonstrates higher levels of comprehension as well as an improved ability to store and retrieve information from their short term memory.

Although all students demonstrated an improvement from their initial scores, Student A made minimal gains with his comprehension scores. A possible factor to influence this could be explained from his absence from two of the sessions undertaken. Student D also showed little progress in his comprehension results and this could have been influenced by him becoming increasingly anxious around the time of post testing as he had undertaken tutoring and was feeling under pressure and overwhelmed with the increase in his workload. The comprehension post assessment was also conducted at the end of the school term and the students were easily distracted and lacked focus.

Each student's self efficacy improved as the investigation progressed as they became more familiar with the strategy instruction. They found the process of having the modeling and scaffolding of instruction to be supportive as with the collaboration and ability to work with each other and to give and receive feedback to be useful. As they were withdrawn from the regular classroom and were in an environment that was supportive, it allowed to them to feel comfortable and be prepared to make mistakes and take risks.

The provision of the acronym allowed for the students to develop and use a self script that enabled them to remember and put into practice what the strategy contained. This also increased their confidence as well as allowing for improvement in each student's ability to confidently and competently discuss the text read. Their ability to comprehend, provide synonyms in their paraphrase and re-tell and well as build on their oral language skills developed. Hagaman (2010), supports this in her work by emphasising the importance of using a strategy as it not only assists one's working memory but enables the teaching metacognition of the how and why which allows for the development of a self script.

Verbalisation of the paraphrasing strategy became automatic as the sessions progressed and the need to refer to the visual poster decreased as they became less reliant. This was useful in reinforcing the process and provided the learning intention for each lesson as well as 'suggesting how readers can 'act on' what they are reading in a systematic way'. (Munro, 2005) By making the intention of the session clear, it enabled participation of all and defined the purpose for instruction. It supports the belief that teachers need to cue and foster literacy strategies to students so that it 'reminds readers of what to do to store what they understand in long term memory so that the new knowledge is available for further use and learning'. (Munro, 2005)

Initially, the students demonstrated limited vocabulary and it was necessary to explicitly teach synonyms in order to build a network of vocabulary. Birch (1999) as cited in Westwood (2001) indicates that reading comprehension is closely related to a child's oral language and vocabulary. Studies have shown that limited vocabulary equates to comprehension difficulties and this was evident with all students within the group, particularly with Student A and Student B who had an ESL background.



Baumann and Kameenui, (1991) as cited in Munro (2005), state that the 'relationship between comprehension and vocabulary knowledge is strong and unequivocal'. Cunningham and Stanovich, (1998) also cited in Munro (2005) support this by stating 'vocabulary knowledge contributes to reading comprehension and grows through reading experiences'. As found in this study, when the students did not know the meaning of words, they could not comprehend what they had read. The implication of this would mean that the students are less likely to read and subsequently learn less vocabulary. As a result, students have limited content knowledge and are unable to access the content to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

For strategic instruction to be effective and students to become self directed learners, 'reflection and metacognition should be integrated into the learning process'. (Wilson & Wing Jan, 2008) They advocate that 'when this happens, learning is thorough and deep'. The students within the intervention group have already established as part of their learning, the process of reflecting and goal setting. Such reflective activities promote goal setting, linking experiences to past/current events, making connections between ideas and reflecting on their thinking and learning. By providing journals for the students, it allowed them to articulate their achievements for each session, identify their strengths and weaknesses and set actions required. Hagaman (2010) believes that reflective processes of goal setting and feedback only 'serve to reinforce performance'. Most of the research studies have also indicated the 'great value of explicit teaching as the learner needs to be helped to make discoveries and take responsibility for their own learning. Students who are effective comprehenders have a 'mental plan' of action designed to achieve a specific purpose'. (Westwood, 2001)

In conclusion, there was marked improvement noted and the sessions had a positive impact on all students' self efficacy, the quality of their responses, their confidence and an increase in their vocabulary. Providing strategic instruction on the use of synonyms and paraphrasing text is a successful strategy and should be explicitly taught to assist students to improve their reading comprehension.

### **Implications for teaching**

Ouellette (2006) states that 'reading involves decoding, visual word recognition and comprehension and oral vocabulary includes breadth and depth of knowledge. Reading instruction must therefore consider the acquisition of these distinct reading skills and the importance of increasing both the number of words in a student's vocabulary and the extent of word knowledge of these words.' As such, the end goal to all reading is comprehension as it is the basis for literacy development in children. The implication for the classroom teacher is that through the explicit teaching of strategy instruction, student learning outcomes and greater growth is evident as cognitive and behavioural elements are included.

The paraphrasing strategy in particular has been found by Fisk & Hurst (2003) to be 'an effective tool to add to a teacher's repertoire of classroom practices intended to increase student's comprehension of text ... as it helps students process and comprehend what they are reading and learning and uses all modes of communication including reading writing listening and speaking'. This combination is more likely to assist the student in remembering and understanding what they have read which ultimately increases their comprehension.

The learning environment within the classroom also has its implications for teachers. As stated in The Learning and Teaching Frameworks distributed by the Catholic Education Office, 'students are most likely to learn in an environment that is safe, orderly, positive and where mutual respect and trusting relationships allow both students and teachers to take risks and learn from their mistakes'. (CEOM, 2009) When students are provided with such an environment, they are open to new ways of learning therefore taking more responsibility for their own learning as well as being motivated to learn. When the teacher engages students in meaningful and purposeful activities and allows for reflection and collaboration, this will undoubtedly impact upon the overall outcomes of the students.

#### **Possible directions for future research**

- Investigate the effect of paraphrasing in relation to the development of inferential comprehension.
- Investigate the effect of paraphrasing in lessons conducted over a longer and consistent period.
- Continue to track participants in the investigation back in the mainstream classroom to determine the extent of the use and effectiveness of the paraphrasing strategy.
- Explore more research into the validity of teaching the paraphrasing strategy with competent students, different age groups and backgrounds to determine a generalisation for the strategy.

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## Appendices

- **Appendix 1-** Reading Interview
- **Appendix 2-** Charts developed by students.
  - What makes a good reader?
  - Why is reading important?
  - Questioning Chart
- **Appendix 3 –** Reflection sheet
- **Appendix 4 -**The Giant Panda (matching original sentences with paraphrased sentence)
- **Appendix 5-** Teaching How To Segment Sentences
- **Appendix 6 –** RAP Poster
- **Appendix 7 -** Results of Scores for Pre and Post Testing for Intervention Group and background information of participants.
- **Appendix 8-** Lesson plans

## Appendix 1

### READING INTERVIEW

How do you feel about your learning?

Do you like to read?

What types of books do you like to read?

How often do you read?

What do you like/dislike about reading?

What would you consider to be your strengths in reading?

What would you consider to be your weakness in reading?

Do you have trouble understanding what you read?

What do you do when have trouble reading?

What strategies do you use?

Can you explain some of these strategies?

What do you hope to learn/achieve by working in this group?

## Appendix 2

### What makes a good reader?

- Re-read/read back when you don't understand
- Try to sound out words if you are stuck
- Break words into syllables
- Use punctuation to read fluently
- Reading expressively by using your voice
- Make a picture in their head- visualise
- Change words you don't understand to synonyms
- Chunk sentences
- Ask question before, during and after reading
- Paraphrase
- Make connections to what I already know

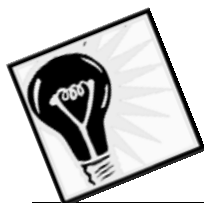
### Why is reading important?

- It helps with spelling and punctuation
- It helps with my imagination
- I can learn new things
- It helps me with my future
- I can learn words I never knew before
- I can learn bigger and better words to use in my writing
- It gives me information

### Questioning Chart

- Who is/ were...
- What happened when...
- Why...
- How...
- Where was...
- When did...
- What is...

# MY LEARNING GOALS



Appendix 3



<b>The action I learnt today...</b>	<b>I now know...</b>
<b>I can use it when...</b>	<b>I'm not sure about...</b>
<p><b><u>Reflection Prompts</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* I still wonder...</li><li>* I am proud of...</li><li>* I need to improve...</li><li>* I still need to know...</li><li>* Next time I will...</li><li>* I got a lot better at...</li><li>*The action I will use next time...</li></ul>	<p><b><u>Reflection</u></b></p>
<p><b>Feedback ( from teacher/peer/parent)</b></p> <hr/>	



## Appendix 4

### The Giant Panda

Like many animals, the giant panda needs a special environment to survive.	You find the arrow bamboo in country that is below 3500 metres high or that has farms.
Its natural habitat is the bamboo forest found in China.	It lives best naturally in bamboo forests in China.
Whilst there are many varieties of bamboo, the panda will eat only four types.	The giant panda has to have certain natural conditions to live.
Their basic diet is arrow bamboo.	The one they like to eat most is arrow bamboo.
The arrow bamboo will not grow in areas that are above 3500 metres in river valleys and plains that have been farmed.	It eats only four of the several types of bamboo.

## Appendix 5

### Teaching how to segment sentences.

The goose chatted with her neighbours all day long.

The violent gust of wind rattled along the rooftops.

A number of female lions coordinate their hunt by silently circling their prey.

Good food is vital for health but does not guarantee it.

When food intake matches nutritional requirements, your body weight remains stable.

The morning dew glistened at the coming of the new dawn.

It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents~ except at occasional intervals.

The human skeleton serves as a scaffold which protects organs and supports muscles.

# PARAPHRASING

**R**ead the text.

**A**sk yourself questions:

\*What are the main ideas?

\*What are the details?



**P**ut the ideas into your own words.

Try to change as many words as you can.

## Appendix 7

### Results of Scores for Pre and Post Testing for Intervention Group.

Student	Attendance No. of sessions	Pre test PAT-R	Post test PAT-R	Pre test Paraphrasing	Post test Paraphrasing	Pre test Synonyms	Post test Synonyms	Pre test Self Efficacy	Post test Self Efficacy
<b>A</b>	10	17/34	18/34	9/32	17/32	28	30	4/6	6/6
<b>B</b>	12	14/34	20/34	11/32	18/32	44	53	3/6	6/6
<b>C</b>	12	14/34	17/34	5/32	21/32	27	38	3/6	5/6
<b>D</b>	12	25/34	27/34	7/32	25/32	22	45	5/6	6/6

### Participant's details

Name	Control=0 Teaching=1	Age in MONTHS	Gender 0=Male 1=Female	Years of Schooling	ESL No=0 Yes=1	LNSLN 0=SLD 1=ID 2=Asp	Earlier Intervention No=0 RR=1 Bridges=2 ERIK=3	Ob Survey/Letter ID	EMA No=0 Yes=1
<b>A</b>	1	143	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
<b>B</b>	1	129	0	6	1	0	0	0	0
<b>C</b>	1	133	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
<b>D</b>	1	134	0	6	0	0	0	0	0

## Appendix 8

### Teaching Sequence

- Sequence of lessons designed for small group instruction.
- 7 sequential lessons following pre-test. Post-test was administered at the conclusion of the teaching sequence.
- Students were withdrawn to work in small group situation for a duration of 45 minutes approximately.

### Lesson 1- Procedure

1. Explicitly introduce the purpose of the session- '*Today we are going to think about some of the things/strategies good readers use when they are reading.*'
2. Teacher asks students to brainstorm '*What makes a good reader?*' Discuss suggestions offered and ask students to elaborate their ideas and list on a chart.
3. Follow the same procedure with the questions: '*Why is reading important?*' and '*What might be some questions readers ask themselves as they are reading?*' Discuss and list all suggestions on a chart. Explain to the students that these charts will assist us during the following sessions and that they can add to it at any point if they think of any new ideas.
4. Teacher introduces the Reflective Journal and provides each student with an individual copy that has been made into a booklet.
5. Teacher explains to the students that the purpose of the journal is for their own self reflection after each session. It will be used to help them to identify what they have learnt in each session, something they may still be wondering about, what they are proud of, what they are still unsure about, when they can next use what they have learnt.

## Lesson 2- Procedure

1. Teacher says, *'Today I am going to read you a story called 'Spaghetti Pig-Out' from Paul Jennings book, 'Uncanny'. I will read you part of the story today and finish the rest in our next sessions'*.
2. *'On the board, I have listed some words that are from the story.'*  
(stash, terrible, collapsed, revenge, hesitated, queue, shame)
3. Ask the students to listen for the words in the story. As the sentence is read that contains the word, stop and ask the students what they think the word means. *'Is there another word that could be used that means the same?'*
4. As students suggest words, list on flashcards along with the words from the story. ( stash- hide terrible- awful collapsed- fell over)
5. Ask students if they know what we call words that are different but mean the same?
6. Introduce the word synonym.
7. Students are then asked to provide a group definition for 'synonym'.  
*'Synonyms are words that are the same or similar in meaning'*.
8. Write student's definition on a chart and display for reference during sessions.
9. Explain to students that these words will be used to play bingo in the next session.
10. Students reflect in their journals before returning to their classroom.

### Lesson 3

1. Review previous day's session. *What did we learn yesterday? What do we call words that mean the same as another? Ask students to retell events from the story yesterday. Continue to read the story.*

2. Provide more words from the Paul Jennings' story, 'Spaghetti Pig Out'. Ask students to provide synonyms. List suggestions on flashcards.  
*Hungry, nervous, reverse, enormous, shrieked, pressed*

Play bingo with synonyms on flashcards.

3. To teach the students how to 'think paraphrasing', provide students with a simple sentence. Ask them, *'Can you say this sentence another way by changing as many words as you can?'*

4. Model with an example on the board-  
The goose chatted with her neighbours all day long.

5. Ask students to identify the topic of the sentence.

6. Model how to segment/chunk sentences into key ideas using the number of events in the sentence and the grammar to assist with this.

**The goose** **chatted with her neighbours** **all day long.**

7. Tell the students that segmenting/chunking helps them to reword the sentence.

8. Once the sentence has been segmented, ask students to provide synonyms that match with each segment while still retaining the meaning.

9. List all possible answers on the board. As a group, decide which suggestion best suits the original sentence.

10. Allow students then to practice in pairs, using sentences from Paul Jennings.

11. Tell them to segment/chunk the sentence into key ideas. Next provide synonyms, then check that the new sentence has maintained meaning. Compare answers and allow students to provide feedback to each other as to the suitability of the paraphrased sentences.

12. To reinforce segmenting and paraphrasing, provide students with a worksheet titled 'The Giant Panda'. Ask students to match the paraphrased sentence with the original sentence. Students are to work individually before sharing as a group. (Appendix 4)

13. Students reflect in their journals.

## Lesson 4

1. Review previous day's session.

*What did we learn yesterday?*

*What were the main points to remember?*

*What strategies did you learn/use?*

2. Reinforce how to segment sentences using the worksheet provided.

(Appendix 5) Allow students to work in pairs and then share answers.

3. After students have segmented sentences, ask them to say the sentence another way by using synonyms. Remind students to maintain the meaning of the sentence.

4. Students complete the first few sentences in pairs, before completing the rest individually.

5. Remind students: after you read the sentence:

a) Ask yourself, 'What is the topic of the sentence?'

b) Segment/chunk sentences into key ideas.

c) Say the sentence another way using synonyms and changing as many words as you can.

d) Remember to check to see that the sentence maintains meaning.

6. Share sentences. Students provide feedback to each other as to the appropriateness of their paraphrased sentence. Justify their answers and choice of synonyms.

7. Students reflect in their journals.

*What have I learnt today?*

*What can I do now that I couldn't do before?*

*What do I still need to find out?*

*How has this helped me to understand what I read?*

8. Play a game of bingo with synonyms.



## Lesson 5

1. Introduce text – ‘Hunger’ Rigby Literacy Collection 12 – Upper Primary p58-59

### Before Reading

#### 1. Getting Knowledge Ready (GKR)

*What does the title tell you?*

*What does the picture tell you?*

*Does it remind you of anything?*

**2. Topic words** – ask students to skim the text and identify any words they may not understand the meaning.

*Widespread starvation immeasurable hardship peasantry dawdling busied shawl*

List these on the board.

**3. Read precie** – What does this tell you about the text?

*Can you visualise the topic?*

*What questions does this ask in your head?*

**4. Introduce the strategy.** *This strategy helps you to understand what you are reading. One of the things you will be doing is to make a picture in your mind while we read. This is called **RAP**. Provide the poster that outlines the steps in RAP.*

*Tell yourself what you have read/ ask questions to yourself about what you have read. You can use our question chart to help you. After you read a sentence, you say it to yourself in your own way. You try and change as many words in the sentence as you can while still maintaining the meaning.*

**Let’s practice.** *Look at the first sentence. Chunk and segment the sentence.*

**‘The air felt cold and damp as Eily stirred in the bed as she tried to pull a bit more of the blanket up to her shoulders.’**

*Ask yourself questions. What are the main ideas? What are the main details?*

**It was chilly in the bed and Eily tried to keep warm under the blanket.**

(Student’s response)

**Second sentence**

**Her little sister Peggy moved against her.**

**Eily’s sister was sleeping next to her** (Student’s response)

***Peggy was snoring again. She always did when she had a cold.***

**Peggy was snoring because the cold she had blocked her nose.**

*(Student's response)*

**5. List synonyms used.**

**6. Provide students with the next sentence** to individually paraphrase using the RAP strategy.

***The hot ash made a soft glow in the gloom of the cottage.***

**7. Share.** Students decide which sentence is most suitable.

**8. Scan the rest of the text for difficult words.** List on the board. Use a thesaurus to provide synonyms if needed.

**9. Reflect:** *How did it help putting sentences in your own words? How can it help you to understand reading better?*

10. Revise the strategy used before students leave.

The strategy we used today is called **RAP**. It tells us to:

\***R**ead the sentence

\***A**sk yourself... what are the main ideas?

\*What are the details?

\*What are the topic words?

\***P**ut it into your own words- try to change as many words as you can without changing the meaning.

The following lessons were based on texts from Rigby Literacy Collections titled:

- ***Caught in a Tempest***
- ***The Frustrated Thief***

## COMPREHENSION – using paraphrasing with synonyms

Activity	Teacher	Student
<p><b>Review previous day's session.</b></p> <p><b>(Except for first 5 sessions)</b></p>	<p>Teacher asks students, "What did we learn from our last session?"</p> <p>What were the main points to remember?</p> <p>What strategies did you use/learn?</p>	<p>Students articulate previous day's session.</p>
<p><b>Text retelling</b></p> <p>Passage from previous session</p>	<p>Re-tell what they remember about the text they read yesterday. Provide key ideas and key synonyms used.</p>	<p>Students articulate the meaning of key words using synonyms and summarise text read in their own words.</p>
<p><b>Text reading</b></p> <p>Re-read passage from previous session</p>	<p>Teacher and students re-read passage from previous session. Cue students on the use of paraphrasing during reading.</p> <p><i>"How could you say it another way?"</i></p>	<p>Each student to read a sentence and retell it in their own words, changing as many words as possible while still maintaining meaning.</p>
<p><b>Text reading</b></p> <p><b>New text.</b></p> <p>Getting Knowledge Reading</p>	<p>Teacher asks students to paraphrase the title.</p> <p>What could be the topic of the text?</p> <p>What is said in the 'blurb'.</p> <p>What could be some ideas in the text?</p> <p>Ask students to skim the text and identify any unknown words.</p> <p>Can you segment/chunk sentences into key ideas?</p> <p>Change the sentence into your own words using synonyms.</p> <p>Make sure the sentence maintains meaning.</p>	<p>Students read the text together. Discuss the key ideas in the text.</p> <p>After I have read a sentence I will... (use self talk to assist)</p> <p>*Ask myself what are the main ideas and details?</p> <p>* Put the ideas into my own words changing as many words as I can.</p>
<p><b>Synonyms</b></p>	<p>Can you suggest synonyms for key words?</p> <p>Teacher list suggestions from students on flashcards to use in games.</p>	<p>Students brainstorm synonyms for key words.</p>
<p><b>Writing new sentences</b></p>	<p>Ask students to work in pairs, then individually to paraphrase a sentence and write down their new sentence. Check that your new sentence fits with the earlier sentence.</p> <p>Does it mean the same as the initial sentence?</p> <p>Share and discuss your ideas with the group.</p> <p>Teacher provides feedback to ensure the meaning of the sentence is maintained and to guide students in their progress.</p>	<p>In pairs, students verbalise the <b>RAP</b> strategy before applying it to their sentence.</p>
<p><b>Review and metacognition</b></p>	<p>Reflective journal. What new strategy have you learnt? How can it help when you are reading at home or in the classroom?</p>	<p>Students orally respond before writing.</p> <p>After I read the sentence, I can say...</p> <p>It helped me by...</p> <p>The action I learnt today is...</p> <p>I now know...</p> <p>I can use it when...</p> <p>I'm still not sure about...</p>