

## **Teaching of positive self talk to passive, reluctant readers in years 3-6 leads to an improvement in their self efficacy to manage themselves as readers.**

### **Abstract**

The present study states that *'focussed teaching of positive self talk to passive, reluctant readers in years 3-6 leads to an improvement in their self efficacy to manage themselves as readers.'* Other studies have shown that to enhance self efficacy teachers need to overcome the negative beliefs students have about themselves as readers before they can become better readers. (P. McCabe & H. Margolis, 2001) It is believed that most people are able to read but part of the problem with some is actually convincing them that they are able to learn to read (Stahl 1998, as cited in P. McCabe & H. Margolis, 2001) Studies completed on teaching students with disabilities to self-instruct\* themselves about actions they need to perform to complete a task have shown that these students are able to independently manage themselves in workplaces and with other situations (M Agran., 1997) It has also been proven that students with a good self efficacy, encountering difficult situations are able to persist to overcome the difficulty and are able to cope more readily with challenging situations, as compare with those who lack belief in themselves and their own ability. (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in P. McCabe & H. Margolis, 2001) The self efficacy of the reluctant, passive reader needs to change before anything else as a person's "capabilities as a reader influences subsequent reading behaviour, habits, and attitudes; reader self-perception may determine whether reading is sought or avoided." (C.Casteel, A.Isom & K. Jordan, 2000, Pg 67)

Few studies have found that the explicit teaching of self-talk leads to an improvement in a student's self efficacy. The studies have most often focussed on the reading as being the aspect that improves rather than the student's perception of himself or herself as a reader. This study will determine that an improvement in a student's reading is the influence of their self-efficacy to manage as a reader.

This present study used small group focussed teaching & planning. The teaching strategy used with the small group is Shared Reading, a strategy more commonly known for its use in the recent Literacy Intervention programs such as 'Early Years' and 'CLaSS'. Other tools used by the teacher were group discussions through explicit questioning, prompting, and positive self-script. For monitoring and assessment of the students and the teaching, the study used self assessments, a diary, focus planning sheets and running records. The teaching sessions ran for 30 minutes within a span of two weeks.

Within the two week span the teaching sessions focussed on exposing the students to a variety of aspects about reading that supports and are used by more competent readers. The focusses chosen were punctuation, reading strategies and taking words apart. Each focus was support by questioning, prompting, positive self-script statements and an enlarged text. (See Appendix E) The texts selected were at an instruction level for these readers and were a range of fiction and non-fiction materials, exposing the students to a range of text types such as poetry, narrative, information and newspaper articles.

This present study found that the students were expressing improvements in their feelings towards activities requiring reading. This was also strongly supported by their teachers who had observed that these students were now approaching the task of reading with more confidence and knowledge. The knowledge gained by these students had made them more active as readers rather than passive. The students were now more willing to attempt reading and problem solve when approaching unknown words in texts. This willingness to 'have a go' was resulting in successes and this had an obvious influence on each student's self-efficacy. The change in self efficacy was observed by the teacher during the lesson and is supported by the results of the Self assessment shown in Appendix J. This supports the hypothesis and would suggest that the prose reading assessments would indicate similar results, when in fact the prose reading shows only fifty percent of the students having improved in their reading accuracy. This was the same within both groups of students participating in the study, with three out of the twelve students showing regression in their reading accuracy. The second prose reading for the 5/ 6 group of students shows a major increase in regression of the students reading accuracy. This is supported by the student responses to the feelings questionnaire shown in Appendix B . The results of this indicate the year 5/ 6 students over the four weeks were feeling worse about Reading and activities within the school environment. However, the year 3/ 4 student's feelings had improved over the four weeks.

The findings suggest that this approach for enhancing the self-efficacy of the passive, reluctant reader, would achieve an improvement in the students aged eight to ten but not for the students aged eleven to twelve. For the students that the approach did achieve improvements, it would suggest that the interventions used are more suitable for this age group and are likely to have more of an impact on their ability to manage on text. With an improvement in the students self management behaviours on text, they are likely to experience more successful attempts at reading as they are now able to overcome the difficulties previously experienced, therefore feeling capable of achievement as readers which is an enhancement of their self efficacy.

**\*Note 1...self -instruction is defined as "self questioning embedded in conversation"**  
(P.J Hudson, as cited in M Agran., 1997, Pg 204)

## Introduction

Students who are passive, reluctant readers have difficulty with their self-management on text. This problem affects the self-efficacy of these students to manage as readers. With a low self-efficacy these students are unable to talk themselves through the behaviours required to successfully problem solve their way through text. (C.Casteel, A.Isom & K. Jordan, 2000)

Teaching students to talk to themselves is about altering the student's behaviours. That is how they behave when they approach a difficult reading situation. By giving the students several positive self talk statements the aim is that these statements will prompt the students to change and improve the way they behave when approaching a difficult reading situation. With a change in behaviour the students are certain to become more active readers, therefore possessing an improved self-efficacy for the task of reading. Related research by Martin Agran with the use of self instruction with disabled people suggests that "when students are invested with the responsibility of managing their own behaviour- in effect, teaching themselves- they will become less dependent on teachers and may achieve." (Agran. M., 1997, Pg 4) This suggests that by teaching students the self talk that prompts good problem solving reading behaviours will effect student achievements on text. This will effectively influence and improve the self-efficacy of any student.

Helping students alter and improve their behaviours on text will lead to students becoming active rather than passive readers, therefore resulting in an improved self efficacy through successful reading achievements. Behaviour is defined by Johnston & Pennypacker (1980), ...

" The behaviour of an organism is that portion of the organisms interaction with it's own environment that is characterised by detectable displacement in space through time of some part of the organism and that results in a measurable change in at least one aspect of the environment" (Pg 48) (Cited in M.Agran, 1997, Pg 13)

This definition indicates that a student interacting with an environment will produce a responsive change in behaviour, this in effect will alter the environment and ongoing behaviours of the student. In other words, to achieve a good self-efficacy in these students there will need to be a change in the environment that will effect a behaviour change in the students. The desired behaviour change will need to support these students in becoming active readers, able to use self- management strategies on text. (Agran. M., 1997) To provide an environment that is responsible for achieving the desired behaviour change, a series of positive self script (*or self talk* ) statements and cue cards will be used. These resources are prompts to support the use of self-management strategies on text. (Appendix G) The purpose of these particular statements is to create an environment that will effect how the students use the text information sources, enabling the students to independently process and problem solve the text information ( M. Clay, 1993). These statements are learnt best through what is known as self-instruction. This teaching style "involves teaching students specific verbalisation's to say to themselves before and during the completion of a task. Students learn to talk to themselves." (Agran. M. 1997, Pg 20) Teaching students to self-manage their way through text by self instruction will overcome their passive, reluctant behaviours, changing these students to become active, willing readers of

texts. The expected change in behaviour should see an improved self-efficacy in these students. Self efficacy is the “conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce a given outcome.” (Bandura, 1977, Pg 193) The environment being provided will produce the behaviours that the students require to achieve appropriate self-management when reading text which should then result in them achieving success with problem solving in reading. These achievements of success will assist the students in believing they are able to produce the behaviours needed to self-manage on text, thus an improved self-efficacy. (Schwarzer, 1979)

The present action research aims to examine the influence of self-efficacy on these students reading performance. This action research will use a specific small group teaching strategy with focussed planning and teaching to examine the effects this has on these students reading performance and self-efficacy. Within the small group teaching strategy the research will examine the effective use of questioning verses prompting and self-talk.

Explicit teaching of self talk to primary students in years 3-6 who are passive, reluctant readers leads to an improvement in their self-management behaviours on text which improves their self efficacy.

## **Method**

### **Design...**

This action research uses a study OXOXO design in which the improvement in a student's self efficacy to self-manage on text after exposure to explicit teaching of self talk, is monitored for years 3-6 students identified as being reluctant, passive readers.

### **Participants...**

The students involved in this study are in the primary schooling years of 3-6 and each has been identified by their current classroom teacher as being a reluctant, passive reader needing some extra support. Each student has a history of reading difficulties requiring extra support from teachers and family. These students all attend school full time and are aged between eight and twelve years of age.

Each student on entering this action research was assessed for their prose reading ability. The students read a passage shown in Appendix A that was age appropriate. Results of the prose reading assessments are shown in Appendix D...Sheet 1, Tables 1, 2 & 3.

These students were required to complete a self assessment as shown in Appendix B...*(with the results on Sheets 1-6 in appendix B)*, whilst their classroom teacher and parents were requested to complete an alternative observational survey as shown in Appendix C...*(with the results shown on Sheets 1-4 in appendix C)*. When the teaching unit was complete the teachers and parents were each asks to comment on any changes they had noticed with their student's approach to reading. Results of this are shown in Appendix F... *(with the results on Sheets 1 & 2 in Appendix F)*

The entry of these students into this action research study provided some interesting results relating to their self-efficacy. Teacher observations of verbal comments, interaction amongst the students and body language, indicated that there was a keen enthusiasm from the years 3/ 4 students to be involved in this case study. However, the years 5/ 6 students exhibited no external enthusiasm or interest to be part of this case study. The teacher observed that these students were hesitant, gave brief verbal comments and were not comfortable with interacting amongst the students in this group. Their body language expressed a lack of self confidence and concern about what the other individuals in this group were thinking about their expressions of thought.

After a couple of sessions from the teaching unit the teacher observed that both groups of students have begun to feel more comfortable with oneanother and they were now willing to express their thoughts to the teacher and to their peers. They appeared to be enthusiastic towards attending each session and responding to questions directed by the teacher.

## **Materials...**

Materials used include the following;

### Formal Assessment & Evaluation of students;

- A Self evaluation
- Teacher/ Parent observations of their student's reading
- Daily diary
- Bench marked books
- Running records

### Informal Assessment & Evaluation of students;

- Tape recordings
- Focus planner sheet
- Observations of the student's body language

### Teaching sessions;

- Teaching focus planner
- Questions prompting self talk
- Feeling cards and Self talk prompt cards
- Big books
- Pencils
- A folder for each student
- Reading pointer
- Tape recorder & blank tapes
- Quiet room
- Chairs

## **Procedure...**

The two groups of students received eight small teaching sessions using the strategy, Shared Reading. The eight sessions were divided into two parts, the initial part being made up of four sessions and the final part consisting of the other four teaching sessions. These sessions were done over a period of four weeks with some of this time being used for assessing the students before the teaching, during the teaching sessions and on conclusion of the teaching sessions.

The beginning four sessions exposed and prepared the students to the routine, set up and expectations of each session. They also provided a basis for developing a rapport between the teacher and the students, also giving the students an opportunity to become comfortable with one another. There was a specific focus chosen for each session and the teacher posed questions to the students relating to the focus. The routine of these teaching session is shown in Appendix H, but be aware that the mention of teacher talk prompts, self talk cards and feeling cards were not use during this phase of the Research Project. The teaching content can be viewed in Appendix E, in particular you will see for each session there was a focus and this required

explicit questioning. At the conclusion of each of these sessions the students were required to record in a diary (*See Appendix I...Sheet 1*), how they were feeling and reflect on things they had done during the session.

Following these four teaching sessions the students were reassessed. They were required to repeat the initial test used to assess each student's Prose Reading shown in Appendix A and complete the self assessments shown in Appendix B as done prior to the teaching sessions. As the initial results for the Prose Reading in the year 5/6 group were better than expected, thus would not provide enough significant evidence of improvement, therefore the students were given a second Prose Reading assessment at this stage of the teaching program also shown in Appendix A. This was to measure any significant changes in reading ability between the middle and the conclusion of the teaching session.

The final four sessions exposed the students to the same routine, set up and expectations of each session. There continued to be a specific focus chosen for each session and the teacher posed questions to the students relating to the focus. In addition to this the teacher used self-talk prompts and cards. The students were introduced to these in the first teaching session and were later encouraged to use these statements when speaking with the group about what they could do when reading text. The students were also required to begin their reflection statements in their diary's with these statements. To further develop the student's thoughts on their feelings about reading the teacher provided feeling cards, which were displayed during diary writing part of the session. These Feeling cards & Self Talk prompt cards are shown in Appendix G. The teacher also commented on each student's performance with positive prompts stating what they did well when reading text. The routine of these teaching session is shown in Appendix H. The teaching content can be viewed in Appendix E, in particular you will see for each session there was a focus and this required explicit questioning and self talk prompting. At the conclusion of each of these session the students were required to record in a diary (*See Appendix I...Sheet 1*), how they were feeling and reflect on things they had done well during the session.

Following these four teaching sessions the students were reassessed. They were required to repeat the initial test used to assess each student's Prose Reading shown in Appendix A and complete the self assessments shown in Appendix B as done prior to the teaching sessions & during the teaching sessions. The year 5/6 group were once again given a second Prose Reading assessment which was first administered during the teaching sessions, also shown in Appendix A. This was to measure any significant changes in reading ability between the middle and the conclusion of the teaching session. The teachers and parents of these students were requested to answer two questions and write a brief comment as shown in Appendix F...Sheets 1 and 2.

## **Interventions**

- **Teaching Self Talk...** In this approach the students will be verbalising their actions as they work on text.
- **Focussed Teaching...** In this approach the teaching focusses on the learning needs of each student and the teaching strategy that would best support the needs of these students.
- **Positive Teacher talk...** In this approach the teacher cues students into what they can do by specifically saying what they did rather than just commenting on what they did as being good.
- **Small Group...** In this approach the students will in a group consisting of six students.
- **Shared Reading...** In this approach the teacher uses enlarged texts with a small or large group of students. The teacher guides the students through the text focussing on the text features and creating discussion about the text.
- **Questioning...** In this approach the teacher, through questioning...
  - Stimulates** (engages students interest & enthusiasm)
  - Articulates** (clarify the task & focus checking students understanding)
  - Integrates** (activity is happening- reading or writing)
  - Demonstrates** (students demonstrate their behaviour & learning, clarify understandings)

...The S.A.I.D Framework



## Results

Before commencement of the research, information was gathered from the parents and teachers of these students. This was to gain some insight as to what beliefs these significant people in the lives of these students had about the students' reading behaviours and attitudes. The parents of both groups believe their students to have more negative behaviours and attitudes rather than positive. Within both groups of students, one parent from each group identified their child as having positive behaviours and attitudes towards reading. In the 5/6 group of students, two parents identified their children as having an average amount of both positive and negative behaviours and attitudes towards reading. The teachers with the 3/4 students in their classes believe their students to have more positive behaviours and attitudes rather than negative, whilst the 5/6 students had an average amount of both positive and negative beliefs. Within the 3/4 group, two students were identified by their teachers as having negative behaviours and attitudes towards reading. Within the 5/6 group, three students were identified by their teachers as having negative behaviours and attitudes towards reading and another student was identified as having an average amount of both positive and negative behaviours and attitudes towards reading.

Information was also gathered to have formal records and knowledge about each student's performance on text. All students were provided with a prose reading sample appropriate for their reading age and ability. This prose reading was also taped for the teacher's own observations for teaching foci, therefore have not been included in this research. The results of the year 3/4 group of students indicate that five out of the six involved found this text to be within the hard range, with each of the students achieving a reading accuracy below nine. Student F recorded a reading accuracy of twenty-three which places this student's performance between the instructional to easy range. The results of the year 5/6 group of students indicates that four out of the six recorded a their reading accuracy performance between the instructional to easy range. Student D recorded a reading accuracy of nineteen which places this student's performance in the instructional range on this prose reading, whilst Student E recorded a reading accuracy of five which places this student's performance in the hard range.

Rather than to assume the students self-efficacy, they were provided with two self assessments. The questionnaire was taken from another study currently taking place in the primary education system and the other self assessment was created by the teacher of this action research project. The questionnaire has been used to gather an overall picture of how each group of students feel about reading, writing and school. The self assessment has been used to gather information on each student's feelings towards reading over the four weeks of this research. Results of the questionnaire suggest that both groups enjoy most reading and writing task within the school environment. Also, their feelings towards school and learning appear to be positive. The results of the self assessment suggest that in both groups student's A, B, C and D have positive feelings towards reading and student's E and F have negative feelings towards reading.

Midway through the teaching the prose reading was conducted again to assess if the teaching strategy, the extra teaching, or the small group work environment had influenced the students reading accuracy on text. The results suggest that this approach to teaching the students reading has had a slight influence on the improvement of the reading accuracy of the 3/4 students, however it has had a huge influence on the improvement of the reading accuracy of the year 5/6 students. The year 3/4 students remain between the hard and instructional range of reading accuracy. In the year 5/6 group each student but one moved into the easy range of reading accuracy. Student E did improve but remains in the hard range of reading accuracy. Because of these results the 5/6 group of students were administered another prose reading text suited to their reading age and ability. This prose reading provided some interesting results with the students falling between the hard to easy range of reading accuracy.

Again it was important to re-evaluate the impact this teaching strategy, the extra teaching and the small group work environment has had on these students feelings and thoughts about school. The questionnaire for both groups of students suggests a slight shift to more negative feelings about reading as was similar in the results about their feelings towards school and learning. The self assessment for each of the student's suggests some shifts in their feelings towards reading at school. In the year 3/4 group, Student's A, C and D, although still positive feelings have rated these feelings lower than when they began. Student's C, E and F have improved in their feelings towards reading rating those feelings that were already positive as higher than when they began. The year 5/6 group of students all improved in their feelings towards reading at school, rating many of their already positive feelings as higher than when they began.

The students had another four lessons with each one specifically teaching self-talk, whilst the teacher provided the students with positive prompts about their reading. The questionnaire and self assessment results provided strong results suggesting that the approach had improved the year 3/4 students feelings towards reading whilst the results suggest the approach had more of a negative impact on the year 5/6 students feelings towards reading. The prose reading provided results that suggest that this approach was valuable for three out of the six students in each group. A student in the year 5/6 group and two students in the year 3/4 group remained at the same reading accuracy rate. However, two students in the year 5/6 group and one student in the year 3/4 group regressed in their reading accuracy rate. The second prose reading for the year 5/6 group of students also showed similar results with four students regressing and two students improving in their reading accuracy rate.

To make a final assessment of the impact of this approach each parent and teacher were requested to answer to questions relating to the students participation. They were to nominate a yes/ no response as to whether they had noticed the students changing how they approach reading. In both groups of students, the teachers noticed that five out of the six students had changed their approach to reading. However, the parent responses suggest that three out of the six students in both groups had changed their approach to reading. At the end of each teaching session the students were completing a diary to reflect on their feelings and comment on what they were able to do. The comments in these diaries suggest that overall these students had changed the

way they were approaching reading and that their feelings towards reading had improved. The approach had improved the self-efficacy of these students.

## **Discussion**

The information gathered before commencement of this research would indicate that this approach is most likely to have a greater influence on the 3/4 students rather than the 5/6 group as these 5/6 students appear to have the behaviours and attitudes that support them with the self management of reading. The only impact it may have on the 5/6 group of students would be for student's C, D and E, whose parents and teachers believe that their behaviours and attitudes towards reading are more negative. It would be expected that from this information gathered, that most of year 3/4 students would improve in their self management of reading, therefore enhancing their self-efficacy. Student D may be the only one where there is not a significant change in reading self management as there is the belief by both the teacher and parents that this student already has positive behaviours and attitudes towards reading.

The prose reading assessments before any teaching suggest that the year 3/4 group of students are again the most likely to improve with the majority having a low reading accuracy rate for a text suited to their reading and ability. It would also be expected that Student F in the year 3/4 would either retain the reading accuracy already recorded or dramatically increase this reading accuracy rate. However the year 5/6 group of students appear to already have a good reading accuracy rate which is why they are less likely to improve with this approach. The students expected to make some improvements to their reading accuracy rate would be students D & E as their performance on this text ranged between the instructional to the hard.

The questionnaire for both groups of students suggests that all these students have a good self-efficacy when it comes to doing reading and writing at school. This suggests that this approach to enhance self-efficacy would be invaluable as these students already perceive themselves as being capable to perform reading and writing within the school environment. Although, the prose reading certainly does not support the results of this questionnaire proving that the students, particularly in years 3/4 would benefit from this approach. The self assessment from both groups of students on the other hand supports, that this approach would enhance the self-efficacy of Student's E & F. The enhancement of self-efficacy in Student's A, B, C and D may be only a slight improvement.

The prose reading midway through the teaching suggests that this teaching approach is suitable for students aged eleven to twelve as it supports their capabilities to manage as readers on text, whereas the students aged eight to ten made very little gains. It would be expected that final results of the year 3/4 students would most certainly support the hypothesis for this research. The year 5/6 students have demonstrated through the results that their reading is influenced by the teaching strategy, small group work and the extra teaching but will the teaching of self talk have a further impact on the reading ability of this group of students.

The questionnaire for both groups of students suggests that all these students have begun questioning their ability to do reading and writing at school. The teaching

strategy, small group work and the extra teaching may have exposed the students to some new learnings which would have impacted on their feelings towards reading. The self assessment from the year 5/ 6 group of students supports this approach for improving the feelings towards reading. In the year 3/ 4 group of students this approach has been positive for Student's E, F and C, although negative A, C and D. Overall, this approach already has influenced Student's E & F from both groups who had the most negative feelings towards reading.

## Summary

The prediction for this research stated that explicit teaching of self talk to primary students in years 3-6 who are passive, reluctant readers leads to an improvement in their self-management behaviours on text which improves their self efficacy. The final results of the prose reading suggests that this approach only impacted on the students in the year 3/ 4 group. The actual small group teaching and the teaching strategy had more of an impact on the year 5/ 6 group rather than the teaching of self-talk. The discussion suggested that the year 5/ 6 group of students were less likely to improve with this approach but it was not expected that the small group teaching and teaching strategy would impact on these students. There are some influences that may help to explain the end results of the year 5/ 6 group, such as, the students were being removed from art and drama classes. Most sessions with the year 5/ 6 group were held in the afternoon which is when these students go from being three classes to two classes and there is that excitement to work with their other peers. The students also appeared concerned about the other students seeing them attend these teaching sessions. Time was also a difficulty with some sessions being cancelled due to excursions, preparation for their graduation and police in schools. Influences of this kind were not experienced with the year 3/ 4 group of students and this may be why they have the prose reading results that support the discussion that they would be the most likely group to improve. This discussion also suggested that Student F in the year 3/ 4 would either retain the reading accuracy already recorded or dramatically increase this reading accuracy rate. The prose reading results show that this student has dramatically increased their reading accuracy rate. In this group Student D was not expected to make a significant improvement and the prose reading results show this student as having remained at the same reading accuracy rate throughout this research. In the year 5/ 6 group the discussion expected students D & E to make some improvements to their reading accuracy rate as their performance on the text ranged between the instructional to the hard. The prose reading results show that these students improved their reading accuracy rate, moving their performance into the instructional to easy range.

The prediction stated that this research was for the enhancement of self-efficacy but the discussion clearly suggests from the results of the questionnaire that these students already perceive themselves as being capable to perform reading and writing within the school environment. Therefore, it was expected that this approach to enhance self-efficacy would be invaluable for these students. The final results show that this approach enhanced the feelings of the year 3/ 4 students towards performing reading and writing within the school environment, however with the year 5/ 6 group of students the feelings were more negative than positive. These results suggests that this approach is suitable for students aged eight to ten, however the results from the

self assessments suggest that both groups of students would benefit from this approach to enhancing self efficacy. In the discussion it was suggested that for both groups of students this approach would enhance the self-efficacy of Student's E & F and the enhancement of self-efficacy in Student's A, B, C and D would only be a slight improvement. The final results show that all students made significant improvements in their feelings towards the performance of reading and writing within the school environment.

Finally, this research would suggest that the questionnaire, self assessment, prose reading and diary results of year 3/ 4 group of students supports the hypothesis which predicted that the students receiving this explicit teaching would improve in their self management of reading, therefore enhancing their self efficacy. Results from the prose reading and questionnaire for the year 5/ 6 group of students shows no support for the same prediction, however the self assessment, diary and final parent/ teacher results clearly show that this group of students had improved in their self management of reading or their approach to reading, therefore enhancing their self efficacy.

These findings would suggest that all students certainly benefit from small teaching and the shared reading teaching strategy, which are tools currently being explored in the literacy teaching practice of today's school (C.Casteel, A.Isom & K. Jordan, 2000). The use of language by the teacher is also most important, particularly for those students with a low self-efficacy (P. McCabe & H. Margolis, 2001). As to what is taught the teachers need to have a clear picture of what each student knows and needs to know and this can be done through various assessments now available to teachers. The teaching needs to be explicit and focussed towards the needs of the students being taught if they are to improve in their skills and abilities. It's most important that we acknowledge and state what the students are able to do now so they can use this knowledge to build on their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses.

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