

*“The explicit teaching of ‘what questions to ask’  
(self questioning strategies’) before reading fictional text,  
improves the oral reading comprehension and reading accuracy  
for Grade 3 students.”*

## **ABSTRACT**

The main aspect of this project was the direct measurement of Year 3 students’ abilities to use self-questioning strategies before reading and the impact that explicit teaching of strategies has on oral comprehension and reading accuracy of fictional text. The participants were eight years old, two female, one male who displayed reading accuracy and comprehension difficulties. Since metacognitive skills are essential to learning to read successfully the teaching sessions were based on the ability to know what questions to ask before reading, in order to gain the pre reading knowledge required to comprehend the text. Pre and post testing of the intervention and the control students was conducted by using two commercial reading comprehension tests, Clay’s Record of Oral Language, a word/ synonym test, a self efficacy survey and a before reading strategies survey to determine the level of accuracy and comprehension of the cohort of students. Post test results and anecdotal notes provided evidence that students who received intervention outperformed in accuracy and comprehension students who did not receive it, suggesting that the teaching of self questioning before reading, in the middle primary years, will support student learning, especially those with reading difficulties.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Australian National Literacy Benchmarks for Year 3 reading states, when students read and understand text they can: identify the main purpose of the text, sequence events in the story, make links between ideas stated directly and close together in text (e.g. Predict the events of the story; work out a character's feeling from an illustration) and work out the meaning of some unfamiliar phrases and words. (Curriculum Corporation, 2000) This is an excellent benchmark however, many year 3 students fall well short of this mark and require several intervention strategies to embrace the complexities of reading especially in the area of comprehension. (Yr 3 AIM results 2000-2004)

Although our instructional strategies worked well for most students, we did not seem to be meeting the literacy needs of a certain type of student – word callers, we noticed that these students were merely going through the motions, merely “calling” the words. When it came time to respond to what they read, their thinking seemed superficial and lacked text support (Diehl 2005).

Mason (2004) acknowledges that “Weaknesses in reading comprehension are often attributed to students' lack of both the metacognitive skills to monitor reading comprehension and the fix-up strategies to repair understanding when it breaks down.” Less able readers are often aware of decoding difficulties; they are seldom cognizant of breakdowns in comprehension and frequently lack strategies to deal with their problems (Donnelly 1999). The lack of explicit comprehension instruction is a significant problem for those students who are behind their peers

in ability to demonstrate through spoken or written communication when knowledge has been obtained from text (Pressley 2000).

Self efficacy is vital for learning to read and teaching students to become more strategic when they read increases their understanding of important textual information, as well as their motivation (Nolan 1999). Goudvis and Harvey (2000) listed the following comprehension strategies that active, thoughtful readers use when constructing meaning from text: making connections (personal, text to text, and text to world), questioning, inferring, visualizing, determining importance, synthesizing, and monitoring. They added that Keene and Zimmerman expanded the list with making “sensory images” (P. 7). Researchers have noted that multifaceted approaches that include procedural facilitators for learning (questioning, prompt or simple outline of learning structures) and cognitive strategies are more effective in supporting students learning (Baker, Gertsen, & Scanlon, 2002).

With increased emphasis on testing results, how does an educator elevate literature instruction to a conversation rich with ideas? (Litwiller Lloyd 2004) Comprehension instruction became a matter of questioning on various levels to confirm that the students had understood what was read. Duffy (2005 as cited in Diehl) When our students ask questions and search for answers, we know that they are monitoring comprehension and interacting with the text to construct meaning, which is exactly what we hope for in developing readers. Litwiller Lloyd (2004) noted that a majority of students were not asking themselves questions as they read. Even the students who demonstrated “good” reading

behaviours and asked themselves questions as they read did not realize how a question helped them understand the text, or how to use the strategy as a tool for aiding their comprehension of different genres. Goudvis and Harvey (2000) believe “kids don’t grow up knowing that good readers ask questions. In fact, schools often appear more interested in answers than in questions.” Nolan (1999) in his study showed “poor comprehenders who used the combined strategy of self-questioning and prediction scored higher on the reading comprehension test than did students who used a traditional vocabulary intervention. Although an abundance of research validates student’s growth on a variety of comprehension measures, no studies were found that measures students’ facility with the strategies themselves. In other words general comprehension measures have been used to assess the end result of comprehension efforts, but no measurements have been employed to assess the processes involved in those efforts” (Diehl 2005).

### **Present Study**

This present study seeks to investigate, and hopefully enhance, the bank of research on reading comprehension ability by examining the influence the use of self-questioning strategies before reading fictional text has on comprehension. Nolan (1999) states that “Self-questioning directs the learner’s attention to critical aspects of the text, thereby increasing understanding of important textual elements. Prediction provides a purpose for reading because readers anticipate coming events in the passage.”

In particular, this study investigates the explicit teaching of “what questions to ask” (self-questioning strategies) (independent variable) before reading fictional text, improves the oral reading comprehension and reading accuracy (dependant

variable) for Year Three students. Keehn and Roser (2002) focused on fourth graders as they read. Once students were actively participating in the strategy of asking questions, 26% of their sustained talk centered more on making inferences, 22% of the time they informed peers about discoveries in texts, and 20% of the time was spent interpreting newly discovered information to the group. No longer was the teacher needed to sustain the conversations. The results indicated that the most productive conversations sprang from self-questioning and wonderings.

Keehn and Roser (2004 as cited in Litwiller Lloyd) Successful reading comprehension is dependent on multiple elements, however, and gains in improving reading comprehension have been more consistent and significant when multiple strategies have been taught explicitly (Pressley 2000). Combining knowledge and skills in the use of self-questioning strategies before reading assists with literal comprehension of texts. It is generally accepted that self-questioning is most effective when it is systematically and explicitly taught.

Therefore on this premise, Year Three students with known reading difficulties in comprehension, receiving explicit teaching of self-questioning before reading a fictional text, will lead to an improvement in comprehension and reading accuracy. Following systematic instruction combined with practice in a comprehension strategy, even weak word level readers make gains in reading comprehension Vaughn, Chard, Bryant, & Pedrotty (2004 as cited in Mason).

Teaching lower achieving students when to use reading strategies and how to use strategies, as well as teaching these students to attribute reading achievement to effort and strategy use, leads to independent and successful strategy use (Pressley 2000).

Also, a reader's selection of strategies need to be based on questions the reader asks himself before, during and after reading to judge whether his construction of meaning has been effective (Donnelly 1999). Self-questioning may be taught through specific strategies such as think-alouds, but regularly focusing students' attention on their own and others' questions before and after reading makes active processing during reading most likely Lytle & Botel (2004as cited in Donnelly 1999).

In conclusion, this present study embarks on confirming what Litwiller Lloyd (2004) believes "Why do good readers ask questions? Reading is an active, thoughtful process. Students discovered the value of asking questions before reading, when they needed to apply the strategy to solving more complex text" and what Goudvis and Harvey (2000) believe about asking questions... "Questions are the master key to understanding. Questions clarify confusion. Questions stimulate research efforts. Questions propel us forward and take us deeper into reading."

## **METHOD**

An XOX case study design will be undertaken in which the gain in reading comprehension and accuracy following explicit teaching of the comprehension strategy –self question before reading fictional text, is monitored for middle year students who have reading difficulties. Accuracy in knowledge and application of skills along with the student's new learnings will be monitored throughout the course of ten lessons.

**Participants:**

Six students (two male, four female) were chosen for this study from two Year Three and Four composite classes. All students were in Year Three and selected after an extensive set of tests had been administered by the classroom teacher. These students were seen to be the most at risk students in this year level. Three were given the reading intervention and three acted as a control group. The purpose of the control group was to compare whether the teaching led to changes in learning behaviour. Three of the students had received Reading Recovery in Year One, and continue to show learning difficulties in the area of literal comprehension, these students will be my control group. The other three students have made very slow progress during year two and have found literal comprehension difficult throughout their learning. The decoding skills of all six students were below the benchmark levels for Year Three students and their oral comprehension was well below the average range. The latter was of particular concern as students while reading were busy concentrating at the word and sentence level displaying difficulties processing text on multiple levels especially the dispositional, topic, and conceptual levels. Below is a table describing the intervention students' learning difficulties.

**Student A**

8.11 years old, with a reading age eighteen months below the benchmark level for their age. Student A has very low self efficacy and often can tell you strategies for successful reading but unsure when and how to apply them. Have very few skills at the pre reading stage. Poor retell and comprehension skills because of the time it takes to complete the reading procedure. Often reads word for word with little expression or use of punctuation. Omits words when reading and does not reread for meaning. Receives extra support through external reading agency and is part of a small group reading aloud daily within the school.

**Student B**

8.4 years old, with a reading age twelve months below the benchmark level for their age. Student B is high English as Second Language student (as evident on R.O.L.) with poor oral language skills. Has very little assistance at home as parents have limited English reading or writing skills. Fluent decoder often used distinctive visual features at error. Has difficulty comprehending questions asked about the text from formal testing kits and often gave one or two word answers. Could retell main ideas of story in own words. Uses very few strategies at pre reading stage. Receives extra support with oral language, in small group, within the classroom. Very confident and willing to attempt any new learning.

**Student C**

8.7 years old, with a reading age fifteen months below the benchmark level for their age. Student C has poor oral language because of speech difficulties. Is a fluent reader but sometimes indecipherable. Reads with a mono tonal expressionless voice and uses no punctuation. Has poor concentration skills and often strays off the topic. Has difficulty with comprehension and uses very few reading strategies. Knows some strategies to use before reading but didn't show evidence of using them. Has low self efficacy and *does not like reading to other people....*



## RESULTS

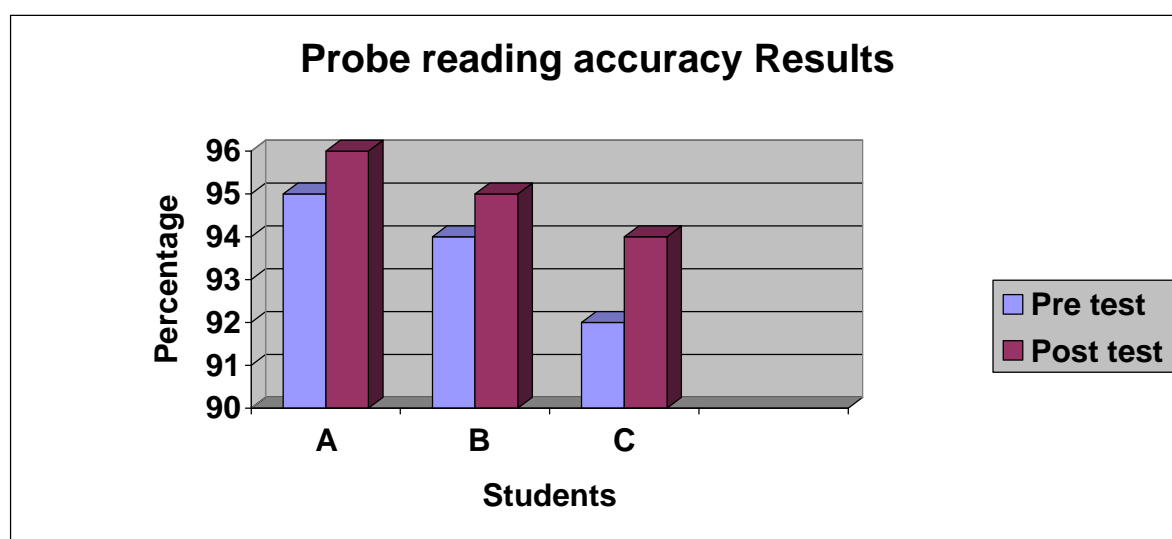
### RESULTS OF PROBE COMPREHENSION TEST PRE AND POST INTERVENTION TEST

#### INTERVENTION

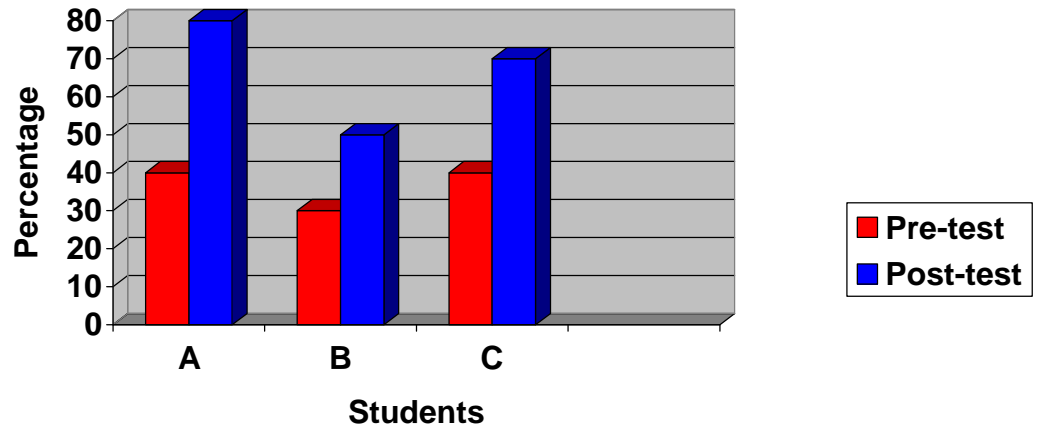
Participants	Student A		Student B		Student C	
Date of Birth	1/5/97		8/12/97		27/9/97	
	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 15/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 15/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 15/5/06
Age	8:11	9.0	8.4	8.5	8.7	8.8
TextReadingAge	6-7	7-8	6.5-7.5	7-8	6.5-7.5	7.5-8.5
Reading Fiction Accuracy %	95	96	94	95	92	94
Comprehension Score % Fiction	40	80	30	50	40	70

#### CONTROL

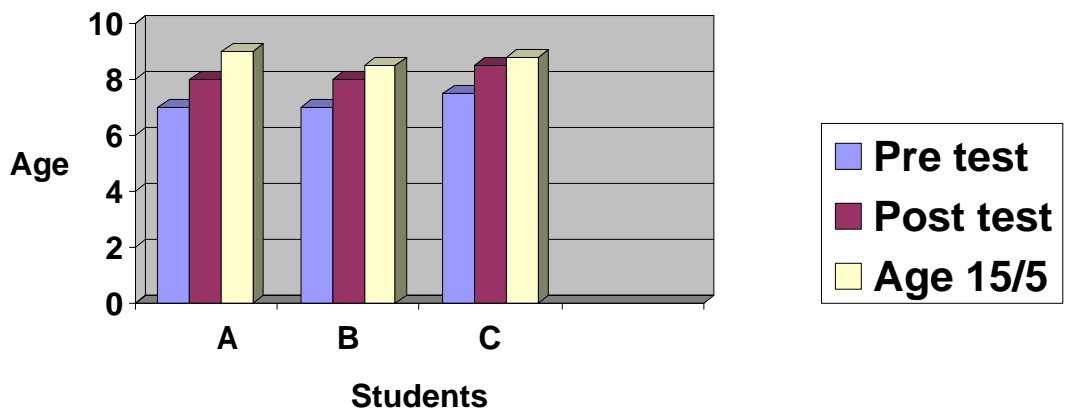
Participants	Student D		Student E		Student F	
Date of Birth	11/4/97		27/6/97		19/12/97	
	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 17/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 17/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 17/5/06
Age	9.0	9.1	8.10	8.11	8.4	8.5
TextReading Age	6-7	6-7	7-8	7-8	6.5-7.5	6.5-7.5
Reading Fiction Accuracy %	92	90	96	98	95	94
Comprehension Score % Fiction	40	40	30	40	50	50



### Probe Comprehension Score on Fictional Text



### Reading Age Probe Test



## Probe Comprehension Test

In the pre and post intervention test, the intervention and the control group were administered the test individually. They were assessed for their text reading age on fiction text for accuracy and comprehension. All students in the intervention group improved in both areas. The control group showed a static result. Student A was initially 24 months below their age in text reading and after post testing is now 12 to 18 months below with accuracy improving and comprehension score doubled. Student B was initially 12 months below their age in text reading and after post testing is now 6 months below with accuracy improving marginally and comprehension up 20%. Taking into account that Student B began with a much lower record of oral language than student A and C, this may have affected their comprehension score. Student C was initially 12-15 months below their age in text reading and after post testing is now 6 months below with accuracy improving and comprehension significantly improved.

## RESULTS OF PM BENCHMARK PRE INTERVENTION - TEST

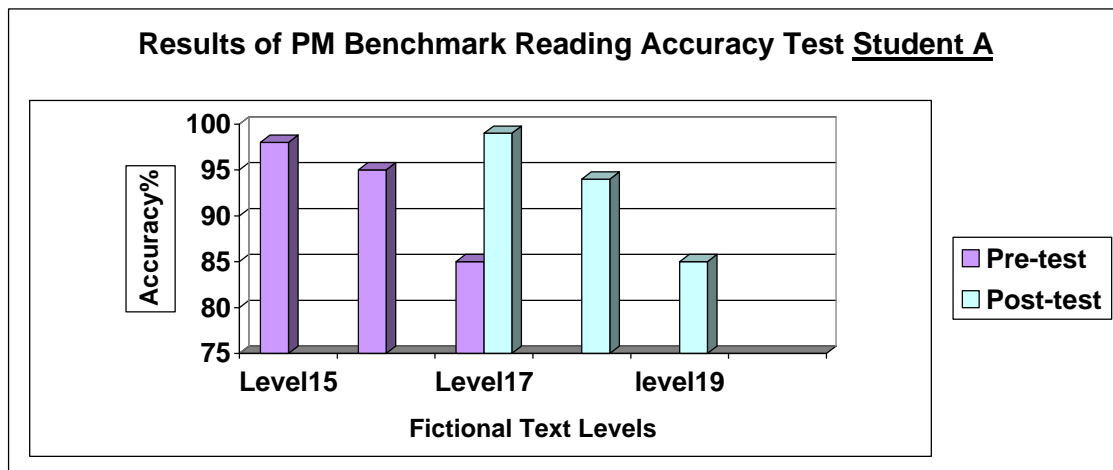
### INTERVENTION

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student A</b>			
Fictional Texts	Pre-test 19/4/06	Reading Fiction Accuracy %	Comprehension Score Fiction %	Text Reading Age
Level 15	Easy	98	70	6.5
Level 16	Instruct.	95	50	7.0
Level 17	Hard	85	10	7.0
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student B</b>			
Level 17	Easy	96	50	7.0
Level 18	Instruct.	93	30	7.5
Level 19	Hard	82	10	7.5
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student C</b>			
Level 16	Easy	97	60	7.0
Level 17	Instruct.	94	40	7.0
Level 18	Hard	80	10	7.5

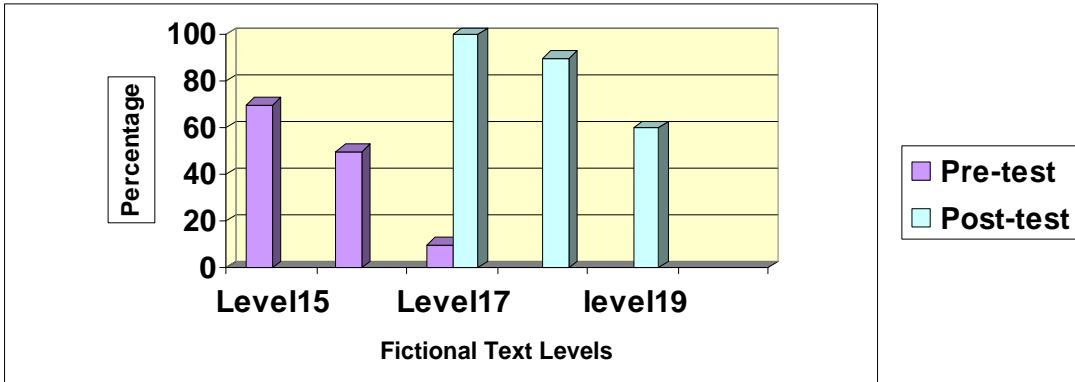
## RESULTS OF PM BENCHMARK POST INTERVENTION - TEST

### INTERVENTION

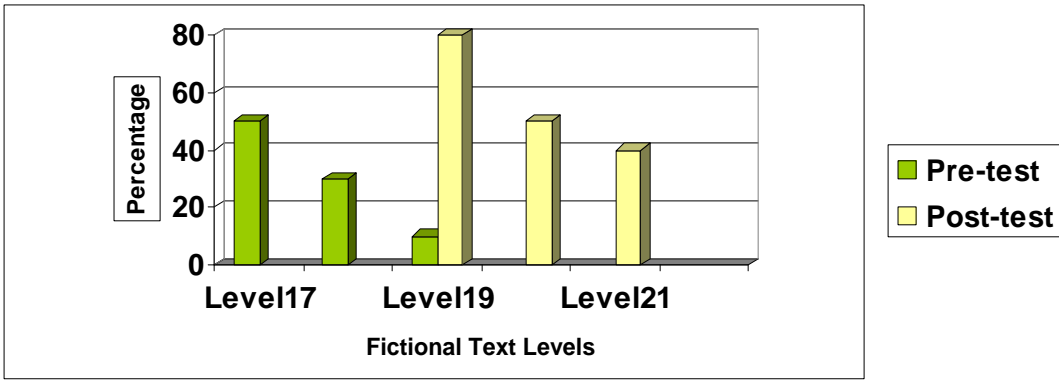
Participant	Student A			
Fictional Texts	Post-test 15/5/06	Reading Fiction Accuracy %	Comprehension Score Fiction %	Text Reading Age
Level 17	Easy	99	100	7.0
Level 18	Instruct.	94	90	7.5
Level 19	Hard	85	60	7.5
Participant	Student B			
Level 19	Easy	96	80	7.5
Level 20	Instruct.	92	50	8.0
Level 21	Hard	80	40	8.0
Participant	Student C			
Level 18	Easy	98	100	7.5
Level 19	Instruct.	94	80	7.5
Level 20	Hard	82	100	8.0



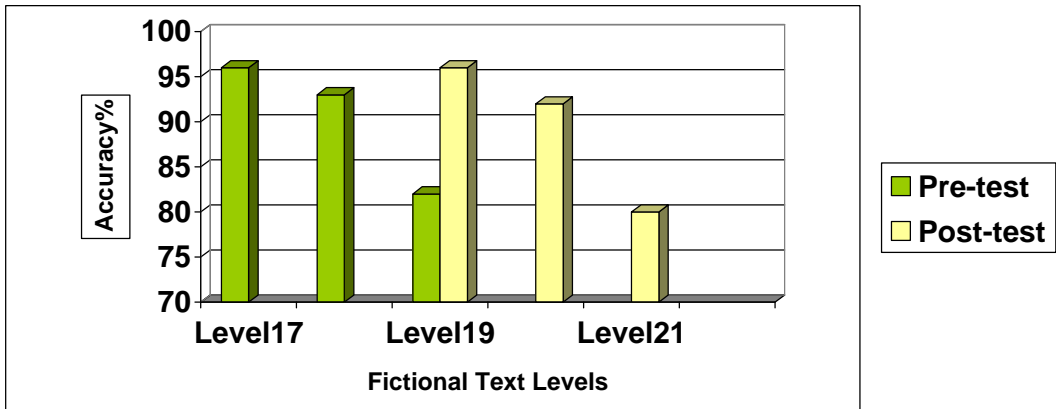
**Results of PM Benchmark Reading Comprehension Test  
Student A**



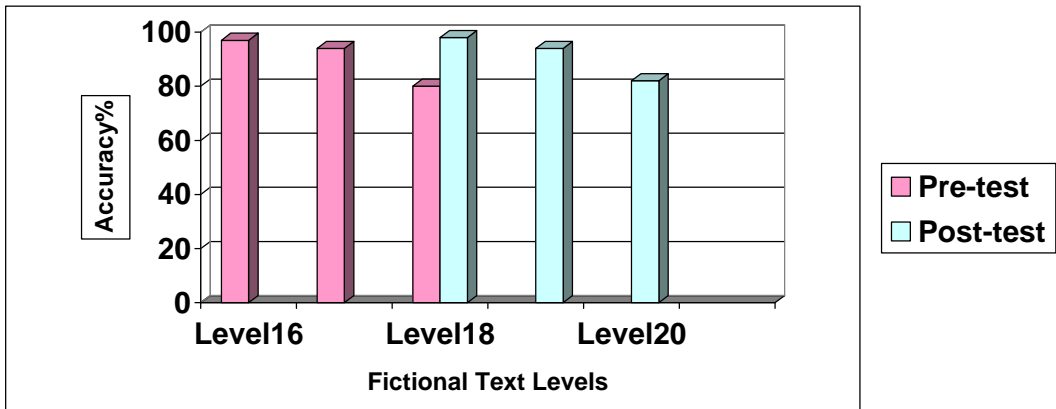
**Results of PM Benchmark Reading Comprehension Test  
Student B**



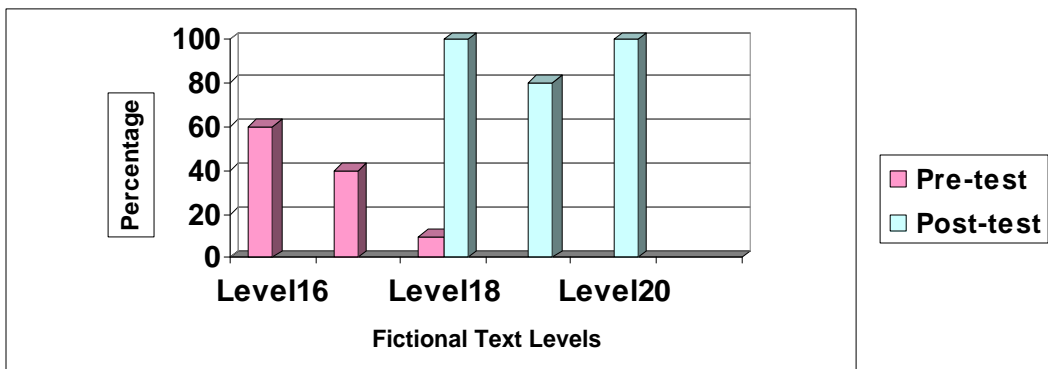
Results of PM Benchmark Reading Accuracy Test Student B



Results of PM Benchmark Reading Accuracy Test Student C



Results of PM Benchmark Reading Comprehension Score Student C



## RESULTS OF PM BENCHMARK PRE INTERVENTION - TEST

### CONTROL

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student D</b>			
Fictional Texts	Pre-test 19/4/06	Reading Fiction Accuracy %	Comprehension Score Fiction %	Text Reading Age
Level 11	Easy	99	80	5-6.5
Level 12	Instruct.	92	40	5-6.5
Level 13	Hard	78	0	5-6.5
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student E</b>			
Level 17	Easy	98	50	7.0
Level 19	Instruct.	92	20	7.5
Level 20	Hard	82	10	8.0
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student F</b>			
Level 16	Easy	96	50	7.0
Level 17	Instruct.	92	40	7.0
Level 18	Hard	75	10	7.5

## RESULTS OF PM BENCHMARK POST INTERVENTION - TEST

### CONTROL

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student D</b>			
Fictional Texts	Post-test 17/5/06	Reading Fiction Accuracy %	Comprehension Score Fiction %	Text Reading Age
Level 12	Easy	95	70	5-6.5
Level 12(alt text)	Instruct.	92	50	5-6.5
Level 13	Hard	70	0	5-6.5
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student E</b>			
Level 18	Easy	98	50	7.5
Level 19	Instruct.	90	20	7.5
Level 20	Hard	82	10	8.0
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Student F</b>			
Level 16	Easy	96	60	7.0
Level 17	Instruct.	94	40	7.0
Level 18	Hard	78	10	7.5

## **PM Benchmark Tests**

To give further evidence of reading age, reading fiction accuracy and fiction comprehension the PM benchmarks tests were administered to both the intervention and control group individually pre and post intervention. Post intervention the level that was hard for each student was administered first. The reason for this was at the conclusion of the ten teaching sessions it was observed (after taking a running record during lesson eight, nine and ten) that the student's oral reading ability had improved. These tests supported the results of the Probe assessment and the pre-test results gave a clear direction for selection of text difficulty for the teaching sessions. The post test results showed evidence of each student advancing two levels or six months in reading age. Although analysis of their accuracy, when reading at a higher level, showed a static result, their comprehension scores changed dramatically. Student A showed an overall improvement of 40% in fictional comprehension. Student B showed an overall improvement of 30% and Student C showed exceptional improvement of 60% and on the Level 20 (hard text) a 90% improvement. After observing Student A & C throughout the teaching sessions they consistently mastered metacognitive strategies, also Student C's concentration and self efficacy improved therefore the results achieved, I believe, were due to many different factors. Student B did gain metacognitive strategies but found it difficult to articulate these, ESL background may be a contributing factor here.



**RESULTS OF CLAY'S RECORD OF ORAL LANGUAGE (Pre and Post Intervention)**

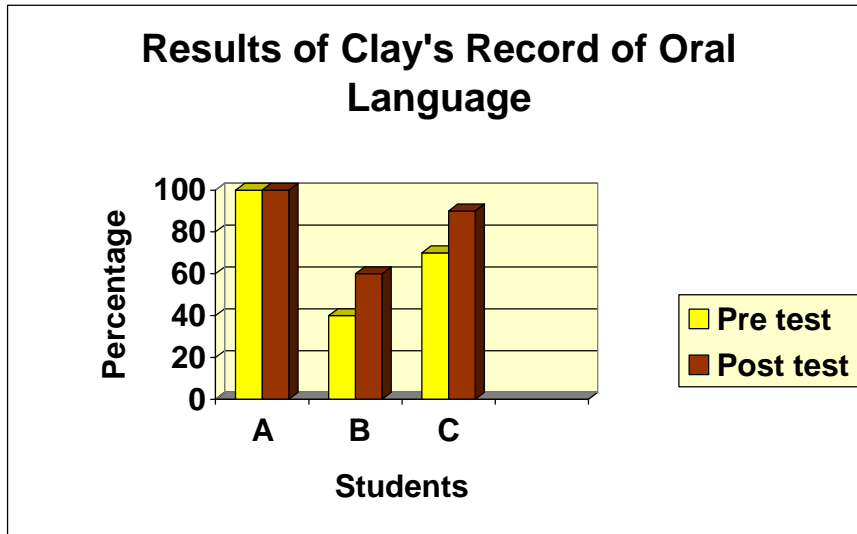
**(10 Sample Questions From Level 2 and 3)**

**INTERVENTION**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Student A</b>		<b>Student B</b>		<b>Student C</b>	
<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>1/5/97</b>		<b>8/12/97</b>		<b>27/9/97</b>	
	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 16/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 16/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 16/5/06
<b>Age</b>	8:11	9.0	8.4	8.5	8.7	8.8
<b>1 Concept Sentences</b>	3/3	3/3	1/3	3/3	3/3	3/3
<b>2 Concept Sentences</b>	3/3	3/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	3/3
<b>3 Concept Sentences</b>	4/4	4/4	0/4	1/4	2/4	3/4
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	40%	60%	70%	90%

**CONTROL**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Student D</b>		<b>Student E</b>		<b>Student F</b>	
<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>11/4/97</b>		<b>27/6/97</b>		<b>19/12/97</b>	
	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 18/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 18/5/06	Pre-test 18/4/06	Post-test 18/5/06
<b>Age</b>	9.0	9.1	8.10	8.11	8.4	8.5
<b>1 Concept Sentences</b>	2/3	2/3	2/3	3/3	2/3	3/3
<b>2 Concept Sentences</b>	2/3	1/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3
<b>3 Concept Sentences</b>	1/4	1/4	2/4	1/4	2/4	2/4
<b>Total</b>	50%	40%	60%	60%	60%	70%



### **Clay's Record of Oral Language**

The test was administered to both the control and the intervention students. It assisted with the construction of questions and the number of concepts to insert into each question, when preparing the teaching strategies. The ROL also gave evidence of the types of answers that the students may give in response to the comprehension questions asked. Student A displayed excellent understanding of three concept sentences pre and post intervention test. Student C showed substantial improvement and gained a score of 90% on the post intervention test. This student's skills of concentration improved over the duration of the ten lessons and this may have impacted on these results. The difference between the learning progress for students A, C and Student B are Student B improved by 20% from the pre to post intervention test but still displayed difficulty with their answering of the three concept questions. Student B's pre test score was 30% lower than Student C and 60% lower than Student A. Student B is high English as Second Language and evidence shows this may affect the results of their score on the ROL. It is possible that this also affects Student C's oral expression of comprehension of texts, hence the lower scores on the Probe and PM Benchmark tests.

## WORD READING/ SYNONYMS TEST

(Pre Test and Intervention Students only)

19/4/06

Student A		Student B		Student C							
Words	Syn.	Words	Syn.	Words	Syn.						
7	70%	6	60%	8	80%	4	40%	7	70%	5	50%

The word reading/synonyms test showed evidence of reading ability and suitability of texts for teaching sessions. It substantiated the earlier evidence that comprehension and expression the main idea may be a difficulty for these students.

## SELF EFFICIACY SURVEY

Student A Pre Test /Post - test	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
I enjoy reading by myself at home		X X	
I enjoy reading by myself in class		X X	
I enjoy reading in a group in class	X		X
I enjoy being read to in class			X X
Reading is.....	OK but sometimes very hard		
Reading is.....	Good it helps me learn new things		

### SELF EFFICIACY SURVEY

Student B Pre Test / <b>Post - test</b>	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
I enjoy reading by myself at home		X X	
I enjoy reading by myself in class		X X	
I enjoy reading in a group in class		X	X
I enjoy being read to in class			X X
Reading is.....	Much harder in Grade 3 than Grade 2		
Reading is.....	<a href="#">fun when I read with my group</a>		

Student C Pre Test / <b>Post - test</b>	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
I enjoy reading by myself at home		X	X
I enjoy reading by myself in class	X	X	
I enjoy reading in a group in class		X X	
I enjoy being read to in class			X X
Reading is.....	Fun when its with other people		
Reading is.....	<a href="#">Always fun, I love to read</a>		

## Self Efficacy

Throughout this study the intervention students manifest evidence in development of self efficacy. They began as passive learners and overtime became active risk taking participants .These self efficacy results reiterate this and the student's classroom teachers confirmed that the same behaviour was displayed in small group activity in the classroom.

## BEFORE READING STRATEGIES SURVEY Pre and Post Intervention

### 1. What do you do before you begin to read?

**Pretest Student A** – I get comfortable

**Post-test Student A** – Look at the title, pictures and blurb. Identify words in the story e.g. names and places that tell me about it.

**Pretest Student B** – Practice the words in your mind. Look at book.

**Post-test Student B** – I ask questions, read the title, look at the pictures, if no pictures I read words at beginning of each page.

**Pretest Student C** – Look at title, who wrote the book

**Post-test Student C** – Ask questions this helps me read, and know about the story. Especially when I use the front cover and words in the book. Think why am I reading this?

**Pretest Student D** – Use my hands to read

**Post-test Student D** – Look at pictures

**Pretest Student E** – Look at the pictures

**Post-test Student E** – Read the cover. Look at the pictures.

**Pretest Student F** – Look at the front cover.

**Post-test Student F** – Have a look at the book to see if I want to borrow it from the Library.

### 2. Before I begin reading what questions can I ask myself?

**Pretest Student A** – I 'm ready now

**Post-test Student A** – What can the title tell us, and the pictures tell us about the story? How can I find out the main idea? Who are the main characters?

**Pretest Student B** – Is it a long book?

**Post-test Student B** – Why am I reading this? How will the pictures and title help me with word meanings ..... get ....big ....? What can the front cover tell me? I know the main idea?

**Pretest Student C – Does it have a nice cover?**

**Post-test Student C – Who is the main character? What will the story be about? – find out from looking at the pictures in and out and the words. Where is the problem? Are there more characters? What will the title tell us?**

**Pretest Student D – Do I like it?**

**Post-test Student D – Does it have a good cover?**

**Pretest Student E – No response**

**Post-test Student E – I don't know**

**Pretest Student F – Is it a good book?**

**Post-test Student F – Will I borrow it from the Library?**

### **Before reading strategies survey**

The examination of pre and post intervention test data occurred to determine the effects of explicit strategy instruction on both strategy mastery and comprehension performance. The intervention students could comprehensively identify many strategies and questions used before reading in the post test results. They confidently answered both questions and all three demonstrated examples using the PM text they had just read. Student B had some confusion when answering the question about what questions I ask myself but clarified their ideas as they progressed.

The learning trends for each student strongly support the prediction that “The explicit teaching of ‘what questions to ask’ (self questioning strategies’) before reading fictional text, improves the oral reading comprehension and reading accuracy for Grade 3 students.”

## **Materials**

Materials included:

**Probe** used to determine the reading age equivalents in the areas of accuracy, comprehension and rate when prose reading. The fictional texts only were used and Option 1 implemented: Oral reading of text – running record taken and oral answering of comprehension questions.

**PM Benchmarks** commercially produced assessment used throughout the school. Used for the Running Record and comprehension ability when prose reading. Only fictional texts were used, so a combination of kit one and two were administered.

**Record of Oral Language (Clay 1983)** used to determine the ability to orally retell accurately simple to complex sentences.

**Self Efficacy Survey** consisting of four questions and two statements gathering information on the student's attitudes to reading and their reading habits.

**Interview (taped)** – asking the students the questions “What they did before they read a story?” and “Before I begin reading what questions can I ask myself?” Then a discussion about the students' feelings towards reading.

**Word Reading/Synonyms Test** - designed from texts used in teaching sessions (initial testing only). This specifically tested the student's knowledge of the words and their ability to give a synonym for the words. It helped determine the appropriateness of the texts for the students reading age.

**Ten commercially produced stories** – including Big Books, used in teaching sessions for modeled reading, multiple copies for shared and guided reading. Reading Recovery Levels ranging from Level 16-20.

**Sentence strips, post - it notes** – Containing slogans for self-questioning

**Textas**

**Ten Lessons** (refer to Appendix B)

**A teacher journal** - anecdotal notes of students learning over ten lessons.

### **Procedure**

All six students were individually administered the pre and post tests. The three intervention students were taken as a small group during literacy block for the ten sessions. They were removed from the classroom and the teaching sessions were conducted in an adjacent empty classroom. The teaching session followed a similar pattern and consisted of 25 - 30 minutes' duration. They began with explicit modeling of self-questioning in lessons one and two and slowly the students were encouraged by lesson eight to independently use the strategy of self-questioning and then, by lesson ten, be confident in their oral ability to display their knowledge. The Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Litweller Lloyd 2004) was followed using read aloud (to) and Guided reading,(Literature circles are used in the classroom), Appendix A. Careful scaffolding of the students learning and to be effective "scaffolding requires clearly articulated goals and learning activities which are structured in ways that enable learners to extend their existing levels of understanding." Hammond & Gibbons(2001) Initially, it was my intention to explicitly teach the students the language needed for this strategy but after the pilot research study (where the students found it difficult to use my language) it was decided to involve the students and use their language to develop the expressive oral language skills necessary for self-questioning before reading a text. Each session incorporated oral discussion of: knowledge and strategies focusing on the previous day's text, reinforcement of skills needed and implementing these through reading fictional texts. Each teaching session ended with reflecting on success



at using the strategies and recapping knowledge learnt. To reinforce the students' learning, they took home a story with post-it notes reminding them of strategies to use before reading. Questions focused on 'the getting ready or orienting stage' of reading. Questions examples, taken from the dispositional, topic and conceptual levels of text processing (John Munro 2005 Lecture Notes) were used in the initial stages of each lesson and built upon as students became competent at using the self-questioning strategies. Questions focused on using metacognitive strategies. At the dispositional level: focus on purposes for reading; topic level: focus on the link with what the reader knows by using title and pictures; conceptual level: focus on linking ideas in text with what you know, use mapping, networking (John Munro 2005 Lecture Notes).

### **Teaching Sequence**

1. Explicit teaching of strategy "Today we will learn how to...."
2. Discussion of the skills needed for literal comprehension
3. Applying skills to fictional text
4. Shared prose reading of fictional text
5. Reflection of 'use of skills in comprehension'
6. Readers orally express questions they could ask before beginning to read
7. Home reinforcement (Session 3 onwards)

## **Teaching Session – Observations**

Throughout the sessions Student A was focused and could articulate what strategies were needed to become a good reader. As Student A developed confidence they were able to implement all new information independently into their reading. Student A could successfully reflect on their learning after each session and as confirmed by their parent, the behaviours present above, were translated into the home environment. Student A began with very few skills and was a passive learner, reluctant to take any risks in fear that they would be incorrect. This was not evident by the final session and Student A became a great support to Students B&C.

Although Student B showed great enthusiasm and willingness to learn they were the most distracted and this influenced their ability to take on new learning. This slower acquisition of strategies resulted in an inconsistent display of independent usage and extensive scaffolding was needed until lesson six. During the last four sessions improvement in all areas was immense and Student B's results were comparable to the other intervention students.

Student C also lacked concentration and found it difficult to keep focused on the task at hand but they came with the most background knowledge. This gave them an advantage over Student A&C but their interest level was not as great. For this student it was necessary to consolidate and order their strategies so they could become competent in implementing the strategies independently. The main area of explicit teaching for Student C was to focus on their ability to reflect on their learning. A transformation took place by lesson six and all three students became active participants eager to take responsibility for their own learning. They used the strategies and articulated the appropriateness of each one. This led to a “flow on”

effect as they began to verbalize questions not only at the beginning of the text but during and after without any prompting. It was very tempting to develop this but after acknowledging their achievements we continued and returned to our focus. The importance of imbedding the new learning into long term memory was vital especially for Student B. It was a clear indication that future teaching for the intervention students could be in questions we ask during and after reading and the strategy of finding the main idea after reading could be implemented.

All students commented on how asking questions before reading helped them to comprehend the text and assisted them to focus on the meaning, when they came to an unknown word. As I withdrew the prompts the students confidently took control. In session nine when we listed our questions we can ask ourselves before we read the students added “What I know about this topic.” The ability to identify their prior knowledge and see the importance it has for comprehension was evidence of the students internalizing their learning. The response in the final session “I can do it in my head now (ask questions) from Student A&C may indicate that these students have the skills and knowledge in their long term memory.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to attempt to determine whether the explicit teaching of ‘what questions to ask’ (self questioning strategies’) before reading fictional text, improves the oral reading comprehension and reading accuracy for Grade 3 students. Benefits were assessed by comparing the intervention students performance with one another on the pre and post test, as well as making comparisons with the control group students who did not receive the intervention. For Students A,B&C the findings were very positive. The explicit teaching of ‘self questioning before reading enhanced the intervention students ability to read accurately and comprehend the text. The overall trend showed that the intervention students outperformed the control group in all areas. In the introduction to the Level 3 Victorian Essential Learning Standards “English teachers encourage students to explore the meaning of text and how meaning is conveyed. They introduce critical approaches to the ideas and thinking contained in texts.(Victorian Essential Learning Standards 2005) The Year 3 reading standards VELS document states “At Level 3 students interpret the main ideas and purpose of texts. They make inferences from imaginative texts about plot and setting about characters’ qualities.....they use several strategies to locate, select and record key information from texts. (Victorian Essential Learning Standards 2005) The present study undertaken suggests that these aspects of learning are integral to a student’s ability to accurately read and comprehend what has been read and often, students, need these strategies to be taught explicitly.

From the data collected, the area of comprehension showed the most positive result. All three intervention students, although reading more difficult texts in post testing, had gained in comprehension skills. Also, their ability to verbalise

‘what a good reader does before reading?’ and give examples of strategies to use, was evidence of the impact of the explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies. The dialogue undertaken during the ten teaching session and/or their improved concentration skills may have influenced the score for Student B&C on the Record of Oral Language. Block, Schaller and Gaine (2002) stated that “by third grade, most that have not developed proficient comprehension techniques fall so far behind their peers they never regain, even if their decoding skills are fluent. Issues related to limited English proficiency, poverty, limited availability to reading materials, and little opportunity to interact in supportive dialogue further compound the problem.” The intervention students were exposed to scaffolded dialogue and this gave them the opportunity to develop trust in the small group and explore where their learning could take them. The control group was unable to meet any of the achievements of the intervention group.

This study suggests (as evidenced from anecdotal notes on behaviour changes of students from lesson six onward, see teaching session observations) it is vital that for Year 3 students to internalise strategies and use them effectively, that the explicit teaching of what questions to ask before reading, needed to be thoroughly explored before moving on to strategies for during and after reading. This is an important implication for teaching practice as often teachers overload the new information before students have mastered learning. Another important aspect of explicit teaching is scaffolding. “Teachers, through their sequencing of teaching activities, and through the quality of their support and guidance, are able to challenge and extend what students are able to do. It is by participating in such activities that students are pushed beyond their current abilities and levels of

understanding, and it is then that learning occurs and students are able to ‘internalise’ new understanding.” Hammond & Gibbons (2001)

Knowing when to withdraw assistance (scaffolding) is most challenging for teachers and by withdrawing the intervention student from their classroom and not being their classroom teacher was difficult for successful scaffolding. As Hammond & Gibbons (2001) state “scaffolding is temporary by nature. Because it is aimed at enabling students to learn independently, teacher support is gradually withdrawn as the learners become increasingly able to complete a task alone. Also critical to effective scaffolding is the ability of teachers to provide timely support. Effective scaffolding is support that is provided at the point of need. It therefore requires that teachers have a good understanding of where their learners are ‘at’ - that is what their learners know (or do not know) at the beginning of the teaching session.”

The results of this study may lead to further research in developing reading instruction that meets the needs of students who can decode words adequately but comprehend text poorly. This study provides insight into the explicit teaching of self questioning strategies before reading fictional text, and the necessary scaffold support that teachers must provide in order to lead students towards internalizing and applying the comprehension strategies to text. The effects of long term instruction in self-questioning before reading (as well as the multiplicity of other metacognitive comprehension strategies including self-questioning while and after reading) could expand this study. Nolan (1999) suggests that “the fact that metacognitive strategies proved to be more effective suggests that these strategies should be integrated into instruction for students of various ability levels. In

addition, because metacognitive strategies facilitate reading comprehension, they may be applicable not only across content areas but also across skill areas such as writing and other creative endeavors.” Further study in the area of the impact self question before reading has on the self prompting of question during and after reading could be valuable. In conclusion I would like to revisit what Goudvis and Harvey (2000) believe about asking questions... “Questions are the master key to understanding. Questions clarify confusion. Questions stimulate research efforts. Questions propel us forward and take us deeper into reading.”

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

**Gradual Release of Responsibilities model** (text only, graphs unavailable for reproduction) Litwiller Lloyd, Susan (2004) Using comprehension strategies as a springboard for student talk. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 48, (2) pgs.114-125 Adapted from Baker, Dube, and Wilhelm (2001)

#### **Read Aloud**

**Student's Responsibility 20%:** Listens and enjoys text. Begins to use the demonstrated comprehension strategy.

**Teacher's Responsibility 80%:** Chooses the text. Activates prior knowledge. Reads text aloud. Models fluent and flexible reading behaviours. Focuses students on comprehension strategy through demonstration.

#### **Guided Reading**

**Student's Responsibility 40%:** Reads the text with minimal support. Practices the comprehension strategy with support from teacher and peers. Self-monitors reading and identifies text challenges.

**Teacher's Responsibility 60%:** Chooses text at instructional level. Guides students practice of comprehension strategy. Provides opportunity for practice of the strategy. Monitors student use of reading strategies and assesses student understanding.

#### **Literature Circles**

**Student's Responsibility 80 %:** Chooses text. Reads text independently. Negotiates the pages to be read before each discussion. Independently uses comprehension strategy in preparation for discussion. Actively participates in literature circle, having read the material and recorded questions to discuss.

**Teacher's Responsibility 20%:** Provides a selection of text for student choice. Monitors discussions and use of strategy for future instruction.

## Appendix B

### Lesson format

#### Session 1

**Duration: 25 minutes**

1. Explicit teaching of strategies through modeling.
2. On whiteboard write “Today we will learn how asking questions before reading helps us understand what we read”
3. Model questions readers ask before they read fictional text “getting my knowledge ready” (Many readers need to be taught to get their knowledge ready. One aspect of this involves teaching readers to plan how they will read. Munro Lecture Notes 2005). What is the purpose for reading? What might the text tell me? How do I know? What will tell me what it could be about? What does the title / pictures tell me? Am I ready to read – do I have sufficient knowledge to begin reading? (At this stage I didn’t answer or seek answers from the children to these questions. I wanted the students to hear “my mind” working and as I modeled these questions for the students for them to experience how self-questioning moves your thinking along.)
4. ‘Read to’ students, using Big Book – (teacher reads story, students can follow text of the story.)
5. Discuss “Did they think my ‘self-questioning’ helped me understand the story? How?”
6. ‘Shared Reading’ of text. (teacher and students read story out loud)
7. Reflect on learning - Model the questions good readers ask before reading.

**Session 2****Duration: 30 minutes**

1. Reread whiteboard statement from yesterday and tell students we will learn more about this today.
2. Model: Thinking ‘out loud’ and ask the questions again of yesterday’s text. (again, no answering of questions)
3. Shared reading of text
4. Model questions as in (Lesson 1. No.3) add ‘What might the main idea be? What other ideas might come up with these?’ (Predicting skills) for the new text.
5. Read to : New Big Book
6. Discuss “Did they think my ‘self-questioning’ helped me understand the story? How?”
7. ‘Shared Reading’ of text. (teacher and students read story aloud)
8. Reflect on learning - Model the questions good readers ask before reading.

### Session 3

**Duration: 30 minutes**

1. Write on whiteboard: “Today we will learn how to write our own questions to ask before we begin reading.”
2. Model: Thinking ‘out loud’ and ask the questions again of yesterday’s text. (Seek answers from students)
3. Shared reading of text
4. Use ‘shared writing’ strategy (teacher writes students contributions) to record on sentence strips “Before I start reading, what questions do I need to ask, that will help me with understanding the story?”
5. Apply the same questions to new text (Each student has an individual copy of the text).
6. Shared reading of new text. Ask “What was the main idea?”
7. Discuss “Did their ‘self-questioning’ help them understand the story? How?”
8. Reflect on learning – Read from sentence strips “The questions good readers ask before reading are.....”
9. On post-it notes write the students questions and stick these on their take home book to share with parents.

**Sessions 4 – 7**

**Duration 30 minutes**

1. Explicit teaching of strategies through shared experiences. Write on white board “Today we will learn how to use self-questioning, before we read the story, to help use understand and read correctly (The students wanted to write ‘read right’).”
2. Read our Questions list and build upon if necessary.
3. Apply these to previous day’s text.
4. Shared reading of text and discuss main ideas in story.
5. Apply these questions to new text (Each student has an individual copy of the text).
6. Shared reading of new text.
7. Discuss “Did their ‘self-questioning’ help them understand the story? How?”
8. Reflect on learning – Read from sentence strips “the questions good readers ask before reading are...?”
9. On post-it notes write the students questions and stick these on their take home book to share with parents.

**Sessions 8-10**

**Duration 30 minutes**

1. Remove sentence card props and post-it notes.
2. Explicit learning about reading: Write the sentence on the white board “The questions I ask myself before I start to read are.....” Have students respond to this statement.
3. Apply these to previous day’s text.
4. Guided reading (Student reads silently; Guided reading supported students as they began to practice the strategy of self-questioning before reading with some teacher support still available, and I was able to monitor and assess students as they did this, completing a running record on each student)
5. Distribution of text and discuss main ideas in story. (Apply these questions to new text (Each student has an individual copy of the text).
6. Shared reading of new text.
7. Discuss “Did their ‘self-questioning’ help them understand the story? How?”
8. Reflect on learning – Read from sentence strips “The questions good readers ask before reading are...?”
9. Students take home book to share with parents.



## Appendix C

### QUESTIONS USED IN TEACHING SESSIONS

What is the purpose for reading?

What might the text tell me?

How do I know?

What will tell me what it could be about?

What does the title / pictures tell me?

Am I ready to read – do I have sufficient  
knowledge to begin reading?

We added

What might the main idea be?

What other ideas might come up with these?’

(Predicting skills) for the new text.

## Appendix D

### SELF EFFICACY SURVEY

Student Pre Test / <b>Post - test</b>	Not at all	Sometimes	Always
I enjoy reading by myself at home			
I enjoy reading by myself in class			
I enjoy reading in a group in class			
I enjoy being read to in class			
Reading is.....			
Reading is.....			

## Appendix E

### BEFORE READING STRATEGIES SURVEY Pre and Post Intervention

#### QUESTIONS

1. What do you do before you begin to read?
2. Before I begin reading what questions can I ask myself?

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