ABSTRACT.

The goal of this project was to teach Grade 3 children the strategy of paraphrasing in order to improve their levels of comprehension.

Eight children had been identified as having very high decoding skills, but extremely poor reading comprehension accuracy. Only one child had had previous intervention i.e. Reading Recovery. All other children were observed to be highly articulate.

The following hypothesis was to be investigated:-

"Teaching Grade 3 children who are accurate decoders, but who have reading comprehension difficulties to paraphrase, increases their reading comprehension."

- The intervention program consisted of a total of 11 sessions.
- The duration of each session was approximately 30 minutes.
- Synonyms were defined and listed during each session.
- The students were explicitly taught how to paraphrase and were given opportunities to practice through the use of both fiction and non fiction text.
- The students articulated the new strategy of paraphrasing and its purpose during each session.
- A control group of students was established to compare the experimental group to. Each group consisted of four students.
- Post testing after intervention showed an increase in all students' level of comprehension, both in fiction and non fiction texts. (in experimental group).

The explicit teaching of synonyms and the strategy of paraphrasing demonstrated that the students had significant improvement in reading comprehension. The value added to the experimental group was greater than that of the control group who had had no explicit teaching of paraphrasing.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The ability to accurately decode text and comprehend what has been read does not always correlate.

The Heinemann Dictionary defines reading as "to look at, understand or say aloud written words." Comprehension, however, is defined as "the act or power of understanding." (Heinemann Australian Dictionary 1978). Indeed, to understand is the most powerful ability of all.

Many middle primary level students have the ability to decode text accurately; their lack of comprehension of what is read is of concern. The focus on decoding skill during the early years of schooling has yielded children with the ability to "read" books very well. Recently, it has become more apparent that we need to include more comprehension strategies in the early years and particularly in the middle years.
Reading comprehension must be an active process. "…reading is an active involvement with the text which results in comprehension". (Gee. H. 1998)

Students must be aware of the various reading strategies at their disposal to assist them with comprehension. It cannot, however, be assumed that comprehension comes automatically or with maturity. Whilst it may be the case for some readers, the majority of students will need explicit teaching of various comprehension strategies. Not all readers "acquire strategies automatically and need explicit instructions. (Gee. H. 1998)

Comprehension strategies "can be grouped into awareness, monitoring and adjusting strategies" (First Steps 1997).
Awareness strategies include some topic or background knowledge, a purpose for reading and an awareness of explicit and implicit information.
Adjusting strategies include re-reading, backward-forward searching, self questioning and locating the point of mis-comprehension.
During monitoring strategies students "check their understanding by summarizing information, paraphrasing information, synthesizing information…"
(First Steps 1997). They will also integrate prior knowledge with new text information and evaluate information through confirming predictions and the evaluation of main ideas and details.
Teaching the above strategies will "help the children make meaning or to recognize and adjust when the meaning is unclear." (First Steps 1997).

The purpose of this investigation is to confirm that the explicit teaching of the strategy of paraphrasing will significantly improve the reading comprehension of students.

Alongside the teaching of strategies, it is vital to automatise the retrieval of these strategies. This is made possible by encouraging children to articulate what they will do whilst reading (paraphrase) and why this is important (to understand what is being read). More focus on talk needs to occur so that children can clarify their understandings. Many children have a limited vocabulary therefore in order to be able to paraphrase successfully, it is necessary to build a network of vocabulary, using synonyms, to scaffold comprehension.

METHOD

This study uses OXO design in which the gain in reading comprehension accuracy following the explicit teaching of paraphrasing is monitored for Grade 3 students who have good decoding skills but poor comprehension of meaning. The lesson format was based on Munro's Comprehension Intervention Format: Paraphrasing. Eight students were assessed prior to intervention using PROBE, thus determining reading age, reading accuracy and reading comprehension. The students were divided into two groups of four – a control group with no intervention and an experimental group who was taught to paraphrase. This involved the articulation of what students were doing during reading and what this strategy would enable them to do. A list of synonyms was constructed and continually added to. Upon completion of the intervention, both the experimental group and control group were once again assessed using PROBE and the results were compared.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were all Grade 3 children who all exhibited excellent reading accuracy, reading level 28+, over 90% accuracy, but below average reading comprehension. (See tables 1 & 2 below) The students paraphrasing ability was also measured. Two students were assessed with a reading age of 7.5 – 8.5 years and two had a reading age of 10 – 11 years in the experimental group. The range of the reading age of the four students in the control group was between 7 – 13.5 years.
The experimental group was withdrawn from the classroom for 11 teaching sessions. Each session was for approximately 30 minutes.

MATERIALS

- Assessment tools - PROBE – an assessment of reading accuracy and comprehension accuracy of both a fiction and non fiction text.
- Paraphrasing assessment – students were given nine sentences with a potential of ten synonym opportunities. This was used to determine the paraphrasing ability of the students.
- Collections – ten texts of various genre types were chosen as follows –
1. Clever Computers
2. Computer Bites
3. Camping Out
4. Water Dragons.
5. Bitten by a rattlesnake.
6. The Crowded House.
7. Protecting Whales.
8. The Humpback Whales.
9. A Class Diary – A Clean Up Project.
10. Smile!
- Dictionaries were used if required.
- Each child was given a sentence from the text to paraphrase at the conclusion of each session. The teacher recorded the responses. This was used to monitor any changes in paraphrasing ability.

PROCEDURE

Eight children were identified by the classroom teacher with extremely poor comprehension using TORCH as part of the Grade 3 Literacy Assessment schedule.
All eight children were assessed using PROBE and a paraphrasing test. Four children were selected to be a control group and four children were withdrawn from the classroom for 11 sessions of intervention.
The first session introduced the children to synonyms using a matching game.
The following 10 sessions followed the following format –
   1. Text re-tell from previous session.
   2. Articulation by children of what they will be doing and why.
   3. Read text.
   4. Read focus sentences from text (practice paraphrasing)
   5. List synonyms.
   6. Individual paraphrasing assessment of sentences.
   7. Verbalize again what we have done and why.

Following the eleven sessions, the students were post tested using PROBE and the paraphrasing test.

RESULTS

Pre test – experimental group.

Student	Reading Age (yrs)	Non Fiction Reading accuracy	Non Fiction Comp accuracy	Fiction Reading Accuracy	Fiction Comp accuracy	Paraphrasing
A	10 - 11	97%	0%	100%	20%	30%
B	7.5 – 8.5	94%	62.5%	90%	50%	10%
C	7.5 – 8.5	97%	25%	95%	50%	40%
D	10 - 11	97%	10%	98%	20%	10%

Pre test – control group.

Student	Reading Age (yrs)	Non Fiction Reading accuracy	Non Fiction Comp accuracy	Fiction Reading Accuracy	Fiction Comp accuracy	Paraphrasing
E	12.5-13.5	93%	20%	98%	10%	0%
F	7-8	97%	25%	100%	50%	10%
G	8-9	96%	50%	93.5%	25%	10%
H	10-11	98%	10%	99%	0%	50%

Post test – experimental group

Student	Non Fiction Reading accuracy	Non Fiction Comp accuracy	Fiction Reading Accuracy	Fiction Comp accuracy	Paraphrasing
A	98%	50%	100%	30%	80%
B	100%	100%	99%	87.5%	70%
C	95%	75%	94%	87.5%	80%
D	99%	30%	98%	60%	90%

Post test – control group

Student	Non Fiction Reading accuracy	Non Fiction Comp accuracy	Fiction Reading Accuracy	Fiction Comp accuracy	Paraphrasing
E	96%	40%	98%	10%	10%
F	98%	50%	97%	37.5%	0%
G	97%	37.5%	97%	50%	20%
H	99%	20%	99%	20%	30%

Data analyzed in the tables above indicate an improved performance in all students in the experimental group in the areas of both fiction and non fiction comprehension accuracy and in the skill of paraphrasing. Student A, whilst showing improvement, was disappointing in her comprehension score. Decoding seemed to continue to dominate her reading. Children in the experimental group were able to answer an increased number of comprehension questions correctly. The ability to paraphrase showed significant improvement.

DISCUSSION

The results of this project confirms the initial hypothesis that, **"the explicit teaching of paraphrasing increases the reading comprehension accuracy of students."**

All students in the experimental group showed significant gains in comprehension accuracy for both fiction and non fiction texts. The increase in the ability to paraphrase showed greatest improvement and all gains may be directly attributed to the intensive intervention.
Although students A and D had the highest reading age, they demonstrated the lowest comprehension accuracy both in the pre test and post test results. One possible explanation for this unexpected result was the distractibility of these two students. Although extremely articulate, both demonstrated short spans of concentration and a high level of distractibility. Interestingly, their paraphrasing ability increased markedly, due to its explicit teaching. Perhaps further teaching of alternative comprehension strategies would benefit these students. Reading accuracy remained consistent in all students between pre and post testing.

In comparison, the control group also showed consistency in reading accuracy; however comprehension accuracy appeared less consistent.
Some increase in comprehension accuracy was measured, however, in some instances it actually decreased i.e. Student F's fiction comprehension and Student G's non fiction comprehension accuracy. Minimal gains were demonstrated in paraphrasing ability with Students F and H showing a decrease in paraphrasing accuracy.

Student F in the control group has had Reading Recovery intervention in Grade 1 and completely misunderstood the requirements of paraphrasing, giving opposites rather than synonyms in given sentences.

Post testing clearly has determined the effectiveness of the explicit teaching of paraphrasing as stated previously "…need explicit instructions." (Gee. H. 1998)

Challenges lie in the degree of difficulty of the material. Will students continue to use this strategy if the text is too difficult?

Although this project was conducted with a small group, this strategy is transferable to a class situation. Aspects of paraphrasing can be taught to the whole class, but the teacher working with a small group of children with similar needs will undoubtedly yield the best results.

Finally, teachers must be aware of the need for focused teaching. The temptation to teach a myriad of items is a challenge that presents itself daily to teachers who feel compelled to teach everything all the time.

Teachers must develop the ability to identify and prioritize what needs to be taught. They need to restrain from trying to cover all needs simultaneously, but explicitly teach what is required by the students to enable them to move from where they are now, to where they need to be next.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. – Paraphrasing test.

Appendix 2. – Teaching plan.

Appendix 1

Paraphrasing test.

1. Sally ate a big sandwich for lunch.
2. The small kitten hid under the table.
3. The ugly, old witch cast a magic spell.
4. There was a flash across the sky.
5. It was a very dark night.
6. The beautiful princess married the prince.
7. The boy ran around the oval very fast.
8. The birthday cake looked delicious.
9. The puppy was happy to see him.

Appendix 2

The aim of this intervention is to explicitly teach synonyms and paraphrasing strategies at a sentence level in order to improve comprehension.
- This intervention has been designed for small group instruction. (4)
- Designed for Grade 3
- Approximately 30 minute sessions
- Total of 11 teaching sessions
- Intervention group was withdrawn from the classroom.

LESSON OUTLINE

LESSON 1.

1. Synonym matching game. Students work together to match synonym cards.
2. Define synonyms – what are they?
3. List synonyms on poster.
4. Add new examples from students.

LESSON 2.

1. Teacher reads: Clever Computers.
2. Selected sentences from text written on cardboard strips. Procedure for each sentence as follows –
   - Read sentence
   - Ask: What does this mean?
   - Say this sentence in your own words so that it means the same thing.
   - What words did we change? Highlight on strip.
   - Identify synonym
   - Add to poster begun in previous lesson.
   - Re read new sentence.
3. Re read text. Each student is asked to paraphrase one of the selected sentences.
4. Ask: What did we do while reading? What does this help us do?

LESSON 3

1. Text re-tell: Clever Computers.
2. Revise paraphrasing, students verbalize – What did you do? How did it help? Recall synonyms from previous lesson (listed on poster)
3. Read new text: Computer Bites.
4. Read focus sentences, individual children paraphrase.
   - Read sentence
   - Ask: What does this mean?
   - Say this sentence in your own words so that it means the same thing.
   - What words did we change? Highlight on strip.
   - Identify synonym
   - Add to poster begun in previous lessons.
   - Re read new sentence.

5. Re read text. Each student is asked to paraphrase one of the selected sentences.
6. Ask: What did we do while reading? What does this help us do?

<u>LESSON 4.</u>

1. Text re-tell: <u>Computer Bites.</u>
2. Revise paraphrasing, students verbalize – What did you do? How did it help? Recall synonyms from previous lesson (listed on poster)
3. Read new text: <u>Camping Out.</u>
4. Read focus sentences, individual children paraphrase.
    - Read sentence
    - Ask: What does this mean?
    - Say this sentence in your own words so that it means the same thing.
    - What words did we change? Highlight on strip.
    - Identify synonym
    - Add to poster begun in previous lessons.
    - Re read new sentence.

5. Re read text. Each student is asked to paraphrase one of the selected sentences.
6. Ask: What did we do while reading? What does this help us do?

<u>LESSONS 5 – 10</u>

Follow the same format as previous lessons using the following texts from Collections:-

LESSON 5 – Water Dragons
LESSON 6 – Bitten By a Rattlesnake.
LESSON 7 – The Crowded House.
LESSON 8 – Protecting Whales.
LESSON 9 – The Humpback Whales.
LESSON 10 – A Class Diary – A Clean Up Project.
LESSON 11 – Smile!