ABSTRACT

Explicit teaching of children in the Lower Primary School who are experiencing Reading difficulties to develop a self-script would help to improve their self-efficacy. If students are taught a self-script to use before, while and after reading, their personal self-efficacy will improve.

The students were introduced to the task in a group of four students. Ten sessions were held over a three-week period.
The outcome of this Research showed a positive improvement in self-efficacy in all the students.

This indicates that students with low self-efficacy can improve their Reading by direct teaching of a self-script to use before, during and after Reading.

The Action Research project was implemented over ten teaching sessions. In only such a short time, there was a marked improvement in self-efficacy. This seems to indicate that students displaying low-self efficacy would benefit from an ongoing program to meet their needs. The classroom teacher needs to reinforce a positive self-script for each student.

INTRODUCTION

Some children in the Lower Primary area of the school (Prep. Grades 1 and 2 and early Grade 3) have difficulty putting into place reading strategies taught to them for fear of "failing" in an accurate reading of text. These children baulk at new words, failing to use reading strategies previously taught and exhibit a degree of physical discomfort whilst reading such as mumbling, wriggling, hand – wringing, body movement and similar behaviours to deflect from the task at hand. There is a "fear of failure" to please the teacher or themselves. These students are not "risk takers". These children often exhibit low self-esteem not only in reading but also in other areas of the curriculum. These

children are often socially isolated from their peers in the classroom and playground as well.

Self-efficacy is defined by Albert Bandura (1998) as *"Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave."*
This indicates that students who believe that they will succeed at a task (such as Reading) produce better results when compared to students who have low self-efficacy.

Bandura states that self-efficacy can be developed by mastery experiences. The student needs strengths used in Reading which are already in place,to be reinforced by the teacher and these strengths built on to improve Reading performance. The subject needs to build a strong belief in his or her own personal efficacy. Resilience in the face of failure is another aspect of self-efficacy to be considered. The student attempts a Reading strategy, which is not efficacious and adopts another strategy immediately without "giving up" or appealing for assistance.

The second way to improving self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences provided by models. Bandura goes on to say that children who see other children similar to them who possess strong self-efficacy are a strong influence in improving their own self-efficacy. This supports recent practices of intervention within the classroom setting rather than withdrawal of students on intervention programs as an effective teaching practice. Observing peers who are successful appears to be a strong positive influence in improving self-efficacy and hence success.

Bandura sees these models of good self-efficacy in the classroom as a positive influence on their peers. The student must be able to relate to the successful student as possessing many similarities to them.

Social persuasion is a third way of developing self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion can be used to increase the students' efforts and improve self-doubts the student may have about their own abilities.

A student can be cued for success before, during and after reading text. This can be achieved during instruction in Reading by explicit teaching for the use of effective strategies and giving explicit praise for implementing effective Reading strategies. This needs to be reinforced at the point the student uses these strategies so the student can see that they have these skills in place, which they can use again in new situations. (i.e. when reading more difficult text)

A further way to develop self-efficacy in reading is to reduce stress levels and alter negative thoughts when developing reading skills. Introducing students to texts at an easier level would result in students experiencing success and developing positive attitudes to succeeding during reading. This would have the flow-on effect of reducing stress levels in students who have low self-efficacy and build up a feeling of accomplishment and allows the student to experience success in reading.

Self-efficacy is improved by the students having task-oriented goals to achieve, rather than erratic thinking about possible failures in reading. The student has a script of self-talk to fall back on. Self-doubts would affect the outcomes of reading where positive talk keeps the child focussed on the task at hand and develops control over the task.

A student's belief in self-efficacy is important in motivation to the task. Low self-efficacy leads to the student having little focus for the task at hand but instead, focussing on a fear of failure.

Studies by researchers such as Bandura have indicated that by building up self-efficacy strategies these students improve in Reading and in all areas of learning.

In Fountain and Fusco, metacognition is described as
Thinking about thinking.

QUESTION	PROCESS
What am I doing?	Create a focus (access short term memory)
Why am I doing this?	Establish a purpose
Why is it important?	Create reasons for doing it
How/where does it fit in?	Recognise other contexts (access with what I term memory)
What questions do I have?	Discover what is still unknown
Do I need to learn this?	Choose a structure or method
Can I use this information in other areas?	Consider applications (Connect into long term memory)
How effective have I been?	Evaluate progress
Do I need to do more?	Monitor need for further action

It is suggested that if teachers used these questions regularly in class the students see learning as being under their personal control. They are encouraged to use metacognition, active learners rather than becoming passive learners being "spoon fed "information. The student who is an effective thinker is an effective Reader.

Sewell and St. George (2000) relate that students with low self-efficacy demonstrate disengagement with the task at hand and have the belief that failure is inevitable. In contrast:
"Highly efficacious students
- choose to participate in learning
- expand more effort in learning
- seek more effort in their learning
- persist longer when faced with difficulty
- cope serenely in the face of adversity
- recover from failures more quickly

- are more motivated to learn

- achieve higher goals in learning

- use a variety of learning strategies

- quickly discard a faulty strategy

- attribute success to ability and strategic effort

- attribute failure to inappropriate strategy use"

Students can be taught to develop many of these attributes. Providing students with texts, which develop successful strategies and verbalising strategies to use and verbalising those which have been successfully used, would also enhance self-efficacy.

Metacognition or higher thinking skills lead to improved self-efficacy. Hartman (1998) states *"Metatacognition is especially important because it affects acquisition, comprehension, retention and application of what is learned, in addition to affecting learning efficiency, critical thinking, and problem solving. Metacognitive awareness enables control or self-regulation over thinking and learning processes and products."*
The student who has developed higher metacoginitive skills has a higher degree of self-efficacy.

This is further supported by McCabe and Margolis (2001) who believe that a student with low self-efficacy which they define as a personal belief about their ability to succeed at a particular task i.e. Reading will not become good readers whereas students will become good readers if they make a *"modest"* effort in reading and have high self-efficacy.

PREDICTION

Teaching readers who have been observed to display low self-efficacy can improve their reading performance by teaching in a direct and explicit way scripts to apply, before, during and after reading.

McCabe and Margolis state *"To help struggling readers become proficient, highly motivated readers, teachers must continuously work to help change students "can't –do" attitudes." "It does require that teachers reinforce this whenever students read."*

METHOD

Design

The OXO model was used in designing the program. Students were tested using a self-assessment of their self-efficacy, the sessions of explicit teaching were taught and the students were again tested using the same testing procedure.

Participants

In this study the children studied were exposed to texts at a lower level than their instructional level in order to give a sense of achievement and confidence in their reading capabilities. There was an emphasis on developing a positive self-script before, during and after reading rather than attacking any new problems. The research project focussed on the teacher reinforcing to the students that they already have many reading strategies in place. Skills such as re-reading, referring to the visual clues in the pictures and similar strategies were discussed.

 Working on texts of a lower than instructional level provided reinforcement to these students that they did already implement many good reading strategies. This provided positive support to improve on Reading strategies and provides a ground to improve on strategies already being implemented.

With this in mind, the research undertaken during the teaching sessions focussed on success being an achievable goal using texts of a lower than instructional level.

The students selected to include in the teaching sessions were all current or former Reading Recovery students. This was not the sole criterion for inclusion in the Research. The Reading Recovery teacher and classroom teachers pinpointed these children as displaying low self-efficacy, which affected their Reading (This is, with the exception of Control student B.) These students had been observed in individual and group instruction during Reading and in other areas of the curriculum to be passive students and have low self-esteem. They were observed to be visibly uncomfortable in vocalising answers in both one to one interaction with their teacher and their peers and during group instruction.

Student A is currently on the Reading Recovery program in 2003 and is reading texts at 90% or above accuracy level at Level 15. This student appears uncomfortable to engage in discussions about texts or reading strategies to put into use or that have been successfully implemented during a lesson In the classroom she is a passive student who tends to dissolve into tears at the least provocation although this has begun to improve during this term. This student is in Grade 1.

After reading research material of the importance of the positive influence of a successful peer to model self- efficacy, a student was chosen to be such a model. A "control" student, Student B was included in the study. This student has very high self-esteem and is unfazed by any setbacks and has the ability to "bounce back" in most situations. This student is very articulate and needs little prompts to join in any discussion. This student displays high self-efficacy in all areas of the curriculum.

Student B has also been on Reading Recovery in 2003 and is very articulate and self-confidant. This student has many reading strategies in place, which she utilises when reading text. Student B is also in Grade 1.

This student was on the Reading Recovery program, entering the program reading at Level 2 and completing the program after a period of ten weeks reading at Level 20. This student often verbalises strategies she was using, monitored her reading and self-corrected on most occasions. This student used many strategies to read. It was observed that the student quickly implemented another strategy if the first strategy was not effective. This was often verbalised by the student. This student has firm beliefs in her own self-efficacy.

I have included Student B in this Research Project to act as a control model. Research has shown that observing successful peers whom they can relate to as a social model influences students behaviour. The students can observe the similarities to this model who demonstrates good self-efficacy. Student B has been on the Reading Recovery program and is of a similar age to the other students. This student was expected to model and articulate strategies that she has used before, during and after reading and her enthusiastic approach to Reading and other Literacy tasks provides a good model to other students in the study.

Student C was on the Reading Recovery program in 2002 and is currently in Grade 2. This student successfully left the program reading at Level 19 and is currently reading texts at Level 21. However, this student does not demonstrate the use of knowledge that has been reinforced during the Reading Recovery program when working in small groups for Guided Reading instruction. She has low self- efficacy. Her low self-esteem appears to hamper her improvement in Reading.

The fourth child, Student D is in Grade 3 and was on the Reading Recovery program in 2001. Student D successfully completed the program reading at Level 18 and is reading texts at Level 26. During the Reading Recovery program Student D showed signs of being a withdrawn child with little self-confidence and has been observed in the classroom setting to appear to be uncomfortable. This is observable when the student is interacting on a one to one basis or in a group.

Materials

Texts ranging from Levels 9,10 and 11 were used during the ten teaching sessions. These were from fiction and non-fiction sources and a range of genres were chosen. (See Appendix 1 for book titles)
The students were tested on an individual basis using an adaptation of the SEAT: Self Efficacy for Academics Task by S.V. Owen and S.M. Baum. (See Appendix 1). Each answer was graded as 1,2 or 3 and pre and post test results were plotted.

The students were assessed individually using this scale. Other measures used were anecdotal reports by the Reading Recovery teacher and their classroom teachers on their reading behaviours and informal assessments of self-efficacy.

The ten teaching sessions were conducted in a group setting during the Literacy block in an adjacent Resource room. As this room is routinely used during the Literacy program, it was felt that the children would not see themselves as being withdrawn from their usual tasks, but that the Research Program sessions would reflect a teaching group that they were accustomed to during Literacy time. The sessions were held on ten consecutive school days. Each session lasted for 30 – 40 minutes.

The students would discuss what a good reader does before reading. This was referred to tuning in to Reading.

During Session 1 the structure of the sessions was discussed and the students made aware of the expectations of the researcher that they were to have and active role in all sessions and that answers such as "I don't know" or "I forgot", which were often used to avoid participation were not acceptable. All students in the group were expected to have an active role in all sessions. All students received explicit praise at the time of spontaneous participation and always when implementing effective reading strategies.

After Session 1, when the students had read a shared text, the teacher gave explicit praise for reading strategies, which had been implemented. Success in reading was reinforced and praised.

The orientation stage for the new text then took place. The students made predictions about the text, skimmed the text for new words and discussed reading strategies they would be using.

The text would then be read individually with the group pausing at breaks, sometimes a paragraph or a page, to reinforce strategies, praising use of reading strategies and clarifying the text. Each student had a chance to add to the oral re-telling of the story. The students were encouraged to make visual pictures of the text. The students also made further predictions to story endings. What if? …

After reading, the students discussed the content of the text and what reading strategies they used and which strategies were successful in reading. The students then read aloud in pairs.

At the commencement of Sessions 2 –10 the children spent the first part of the lesson discussing and being praised for the use of particular reading strategies in the previous session. Students were encouraged to articulate these strategies they have used or peers have used in the previous sessions. The children were encouraged to articulate any new learning and also how they felt whilst undertaking the tasks. This was also discussed in the group. What could make you feel better and work more effectively during our Reading time? Discussion and further explicit praise is given at this time. The focus here was on Reading being an achievable goal. Being shown strategies for reading, using these strategies, articulating these strategies and reflecting on the reading was encouraged.

The children then spent some time on word study using slide cards (See Appendix 2) to reinforce the use of analogy in word building and to reinforce rapid automatised naming when reading text.

The new text was then introduced and predictions were discussed, words sampled and strategies to be used discussed. The students then read the text in chunks such as paragraphs or pages. The text was discussed for comprehension and strategies reinforced. After reading the text, the whole text was discussed. The sessions were conducted on a daily basis period of immediately after Recess. This is when the Literacy block is held at the school.

At the end of the ten sessions the students were again tested formally using the adapted SEAT test and their classroom teachers were interviewed to ascertain any informal observations they had made of these students during and after the ten sessions.
See Appendix 3 for more detailed information of teaching sessions.

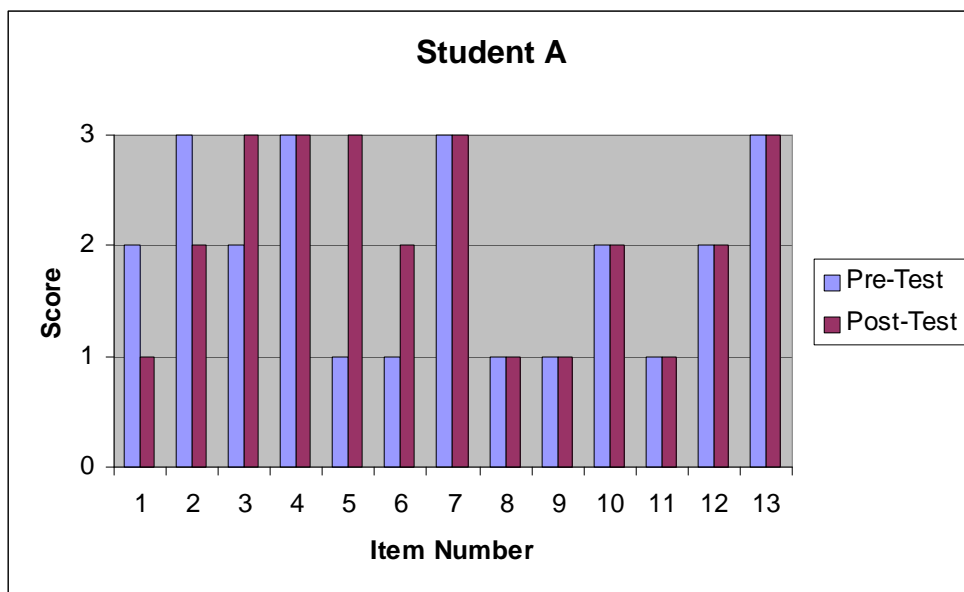## *RESULTS*

Observations of the Group

Trends for the group indicated that all the students improved their "self script" over the period of the ten lessons.

Over the period of instruction there was a marked increase in the willingness of all students to participate in discussions of Reading and personal attitudes to Reading. The control student, Student B tended to dominate conversations at first, but as the sessions developed, this student allowed others to participate more easily and was willing to listen to others opinions and to reflect on them.
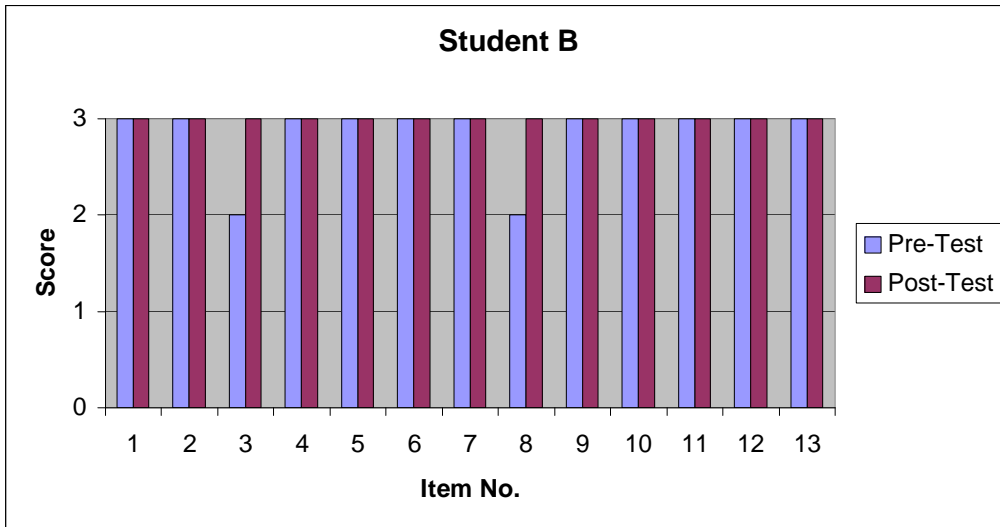
However Student A developed the least progress in the group. Student A made the least progress in developing a self-script for new reading. This student also had problems articulating answers to direct questioning The graph of results reflects this. After the ten sessions this student responded more negatively to some questions regarding self-efficacy.

It was interesting that in discussing the content of many books the students who had previously decoded the text successfully were unable to accurately re-tell the details of the story. This was particularly evident when non-fiction text was used. Few facts could be recalled.
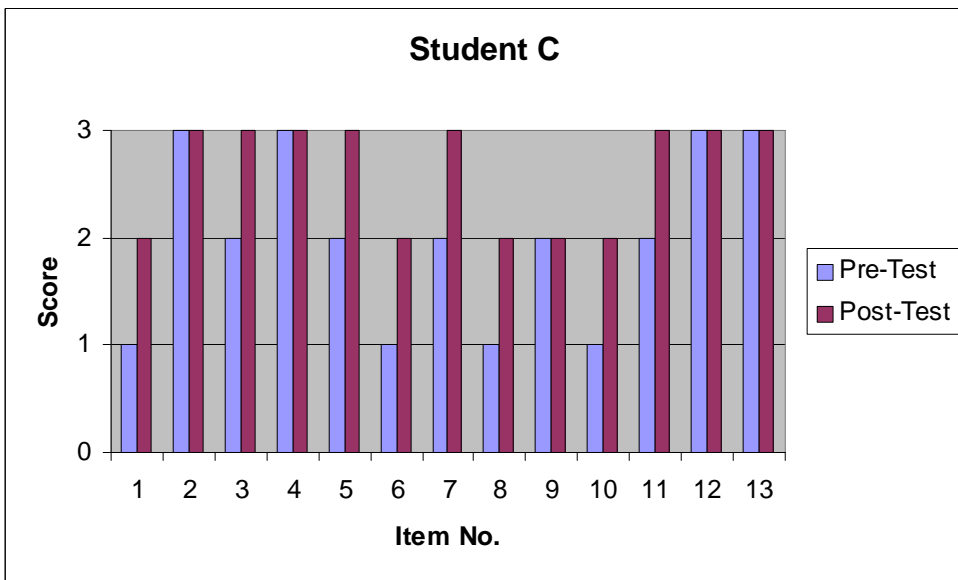
Another interesting part of the group dynamics observed was when the group paired off to buddy read aloud, all the students wanted to read with Student B who was the control student. This seemed to indicate that the model discussed previously holds true that a successful peer is seen as a good model to other students.
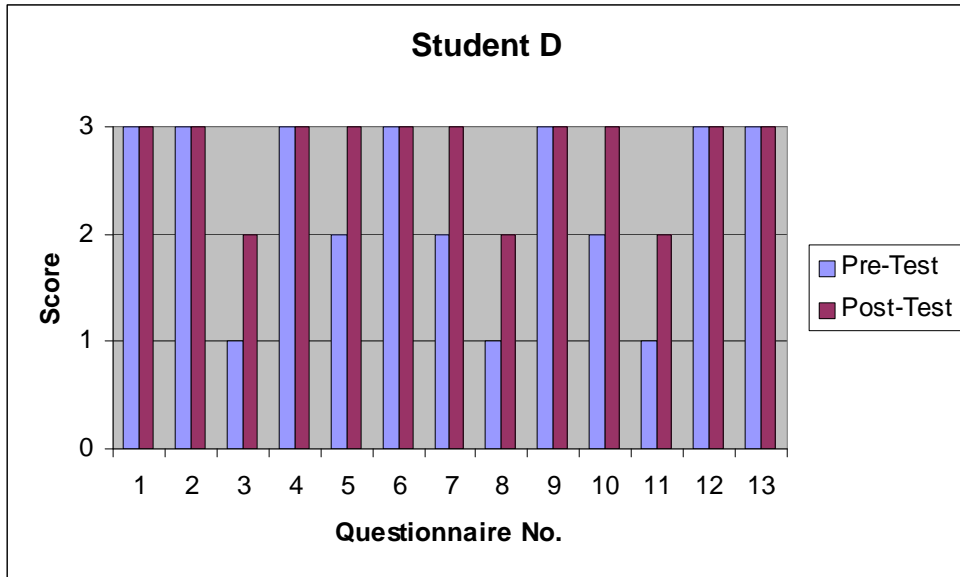

The item which did not improve was Item 1 referred to reading out loud in front of others, The items which remained unchanged were :Item 8 referred to reading a story without pictures, Item 9 to reading a new story, Item 11 to asking the teacher for help while reading Other items showed improvement.

Student B

This student was the control student. The graph reflects that this student had high self-efficacy before the teaching sessions, Item 8 showed improvement in reading a story with no pictures.

Student C

Student C showed improvement in the areas assessed.

Student D

The graph shows improvement in self-efficacy in the questions, which scored 1 at pre-test. This student benefited from the development of a self-script in reading.

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Extent of Support for the Prediction

Trends for the group indicated that all students did improve their self-efficacy in Reading by having a specific self-script that can be used for Reading. The implications of this Research indicate that these students have a need for on-going affirmation of the success of their Reading. In only such a short period as ten teaching sessions gains were observed and this has implications in the classroom. These children displaying low self-efficacy need on going support in the classroom. Classroom teachers need to support a positive self-efficacy on an on-going basis.

Implications for teaching practice

Results of the research undertaken on self-efficacy indicate that explicit teaching for improving self-efficacy can improve a students Reading ability. With each of the students in this study being from different classrooms the classroom teachers were given an overview of what the research involved and its implications for these students in their classroom settings.

The teachers recognised these students as having low self-efficacy.

The teacher of Student A was particularly concerned that this student's low self-efficacy was affecting other areas of the curriculum as well as Reading. Interestingly, this student left each teaching session and reported each detail to the class teacher.

Future Research as a Result of these Results

The students in this study could be observed using the questionnaire after a lapse of some time and interviewing and observing these students in the classroom. In each session, the students were cued for re-telling the story of the text of the previous session and any new learning which occurred.

The teachers who have these students in their classrooms were made aware of the Research project. They were shown how the sessions were conducted and the results were discussed. This must have a positive implication for raising the awareness of these teachers to the needs of students with low self-efficacy.

The results of this study support my hypothesis that explicit praise and instruction can enhance self-efficacy in Reading.

However I feel that the short nature of this study prevents predictions of the long term effects of the self- efficacy strategies taught as the isolated ten sessions.

The implications of this study suggest that promoting self-efficacy in particular to these target children at risk should be an ongoing task which is the task of

the classroom teacher on a day to day basis. Further professional development in this area could refine and enhance teaching practices for students with low self-efficacy.

Greg Smith in "Metacognition Begins With Me" says, "To teach better thinking skills, a planned sequence over a term or semester is better. The skills to learn and many to reinforce so selection is often determined by the learning." This reinforces the idea that an isolated ten sessions is not enough to sustain long term gains in self-efficacy but that improved self-efficacy is on going and a long term goal in Reading.

APPENDIX 1

TEXTS USED FOR TEN SESSIONS

Session

1. RR 9 Three Little Ducks- Story Box
2. RR 9 Big Cat, Little Cat – Young Australia
3. RR 9 Who Will Be my Mother? – Story Box
4. RR 9 How to Make an Earthworm Farm - Macmillan
5. RR 9 Which Way Now? – Magic Bean
6. RR 10 Recycling – Macmillan
7.
8. RR 11 Maria's Duck – Macmillan
9. RR 11 Keeping Clean, Getting Dirty – Macmillan
10. RR 11 Today - Macmillan

APPENDIX 3

Session 1		
Explain purpose of sessions –"To become better readers whilst reading alone, in a group or out loud (Either to self or another) student.		5 Minutes
<u>Word Study</u> Focus on word attack skills using slide cards.	Aim to rapidly recognise new words from known words (use of analogy)	5 Minutes
<u>Getting Ready or Orienting Stage</u> Introduce new text. Discuss what we will do before reading. Prediction of text from cover, looking at pictures and title. Scan pictures and text. Work on unknown words. Revise predictions?		5 Minutes
<u>While Reading Stage:Processing text and Self-Monitoring</u> .	**Sentence Level** Read portions of book, paragraphs or page. Listen to themselves as they read. Visualise what has been read. Make a picture in your mind about the story	10 Minutes

	Does it make sense/fit in? Re- read to make meaning. **Conceptual Level** Discuss the text. What is the story about? Build up ideas about the text. Review and consoidate – What do I know now? Word Level When a child gets to a difficult word. • Use context of word and the first few initial sounds to confirm. • Read to end of the sentence and re-read.. • Use word analysis and re-read.	
After Reading	– Discuss earlier predictions. Orally retell story. Predict other endings if possible. (Fiction text) Reactions to text. Evaluate reading strategies used.What worked? Increase word knowledge. Add to repertoire of words	10 Minutes

	to use.	
Sessions 2 -10		
Give explicit praise for reading strategies used in previous session.		5 Minutes
Word Study Focus on word attack skills using slide cards.		5 Minutes
Introduce new text. Discuss what we will do **before reading.** Predicition of text from civer picture and title. Scan pictures and text. Work on unknown words. Revise predictions?		5 Minutes
While reading – Read portions of book, paragraphs or page. Discuss the text. What is the story about? Make a picture in your mind about the story.		10 Minutes
After reading – Discuss earlier predictions. Orally retell story. Predict other endings if possible. (Fiction text)		10 Minutes

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