

## **Developing meaning through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve the reading comprehension and oral retell of students.**

### **Abstract:**

The objective of this Action Research was to teach Year 2 children are at risk in the area of literacy, the strategy of paraphrasing in order to improve their comprehension and oral retell.

The four students have been identified as having poor decoding skills and equally as poor comprehension skills. None of the students have received any previous intervention i.e. Reading Recovery. They were all just classed as 'below average' in literacy.

The aim of this research was to test the following hypothesis:

**“Developing meaning through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve the reading comprehension and oral retell of students”.**

- The intervention ran for 11 sessions
- Each session was approximately 30 – 45 minutes
- The teacher modeled how to paraphrase, taught its purpose and developed the understanding and use of synonyms
- The students articulated the new strategy of paraphrasing and its purpose during each session
- Pre-testing and post-testing showed improved levels of comprehension and oral retell.
- The results substantiate the belief that the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve the reading comprehension and oral retell of students.

### **The Broad Topic/Problem:**

Reading is a process that requires the skills of decoding and comprehending. Unfortunately, the ability to decode and comprehend what has been read does not always develop at the same rate.

“Reading is to look at, understand or say aloud written words”. (The Heinemann Dictionary 1978)

“Comprehension refers to the act or capability of understanding, especially writing or speech”. (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1997).

“To paraphrase is a free rendering or rewording of a passage. It is to express the meaning of a passage in other words”. (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1997).

Although there are various reading strategies that can be utilized by students to assist them with their reading comprehension, we can't assume that comprehension is just acquired automatically

with age or over time. The majority of students require explicit teaching of various comprehension strategies. Not all readers “acquire strategies automatically and need explicit instructions” (Gee. H. 1998)

Word knowledge and an understanding of the structure of the English language are key components in literacy. Children with poor oral language skills are at a distinct disadvantage if they are not able to support their literacy development.

If reading is the act of searching for and understanding the meaning of the written word (Sorrell, 1996), then teaching students to paraphrase and then verbalize is a strategy to assist students with poor comprehension, to comprehend. “The effectiveness of teaching paraphrasing and then verbalizing as a strategy to enhance comprehension, enables the child to self monitor, become active listeners and attain meaning”. (Hellekson, L. and Feilter, F. 1994).

### **Related Research:**

Research shows that oral language is a key area in literacy development. Children use strategies from learning oral language to help them make sense of environmental print.

“Three major areas found to be critically important in the development of early and emerging literacy skills (Brauger, Lewis, Hagans, 1997; Lonigan et al., 1999; Snow et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) 1) are a strong foundation in oral language skills; 2) an awareness of sound structure; and 3) much exposure and experience with print. A strong foundation in oral language skills develops as children gain an understanding of the structures and meaning of language”. Pg 170.

Children are able to recall information better if it makes sense to them and they understand the vocabulary used. Meaning is maintained and built upon, supporting their efforts in other areas of literacy, such as reading and writing.

“The study permits a number of conclusions to be made concerning oral language ability in children with poor reading comprehension. Arguably, the most obvious index of a child’s speech and language status is how fluent and accurate their speech production is. Similarly, the most obvious index of a child’s reading ability is how accurate they are at reading words and texts. Children with obvious difficulties in these areas are likely to be known to specialist professionals and consequently, are likely to be referred to research studies investigating SLI or reading disorders. In contrast, children we define as poor comprehenders have accurate and fluent speech and

moreover, they also read accurately and fluently. (Nation & Snowling, 1997; Stothard & Hulme, 1992). Their difficulties are seldom recognized in the classroom and only when tested, are their underlying difficulties with oral language and reading comprehension are revealed". (Nation, Clarke, Marshall & Durand, 2004)

The purpose of this investigation aims to confirm that developing meaning through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing, will improve the reading comprehension and oral retell of students.

## **Method:**

### Design:

This study uses an OXO design, which will demonstrate that the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve reading comprehension accuracy. Four students were assessed prior to the intervention using PROBE, thus determining reading age, reading accuracy and reading comprehension, PM Benchmark Reading Records, Synonym Task by John Munro and the paraphrasing Test.

The students were then taught through an intervention program, how to paraphrase which involved developing knowledge and use of synonyms. Students were directed to find synonyms for singular words in a text, so that the meaning of the sentence was not altered. Throughout the intervention, the teacher modeled and cued students in the effective use of paraphrasing and facilitated the scaffolding of new learning. Upon completion of the intervention, the students were given post-assessments which were based on the pre-tests given - PROBE – an assessment of reading and comprehension accuracy, PM Benchmark Reading Records, Synonym Task by John Munro and the Paraphrasing Test, whereby the results were compared.

### Participants:

The four participants are all Year 2 students. All the students have low reading levels and poor decoding skills. Where errors were made when reading the text, students made some self-corrections, but at other times continued to read on, substituting a word which was not a synonym, or just omitting the unknown word, resulting in lost meaning of the text.

### Materials:

- Each student was assessed individually using the following tests as both pre-testing and post-testing:
  - ✧ PROBE – an assessment of reading and comprehension accuracy

- ⤴ PM Benchmark Reading Records
- ⤴ Synonym Task by John Munro
- Talking Stories – An oral language program to develop sequencing and organization skills.
- Big Book Texts - The Little Red Hen
  - Chicken Little
  - The Gingerbread Man
  - The Three Billy Goats Gruff
  - Little Red Riding Hood
  - The Ugly Duckling”
  - ‘Hansel & Gretel’
  - ‘Saggy Baggy Elephant’
  - ‘The Three Bears’
  - ‘Cinderella’
- Dictionaries & thesaurus’ were used
- Oral retell Checklist – used at the conclusion of each session
- Paraphrasing Test

Procedure:

The first session began by introducing the children to ‘synonyms’ and ‘paraphrasing’ through oral matching games, the use of pictures and by playing games such as ‘Celebrity Heads’, ‘Guess Who?’, ‘I spy...’, ‘20 Questions’ etc.

Each of the following 10 sessions ran for between 30-45 minutes. They had a focus of substituting words with synonyms and then paraphrasing short sentences from the story. The word substituted had to reflect the meaning of the sentence. Each student had a turn and a list of synonyms was built up for that word. The students then attempted to retell the sentence, trying to change as many words in the sentence as possible. The children then discussed which sentence they thought was the best substitute and why.

The children were encouraged to ‘think out loud’ and verbalize their individual strategies for choosing synonyms and for paraphrasing.

Each session preceded as follows:

1. Text retell from the previous lesson
2. Articulation by children of what they are need to do and why
3. Read the new text
4. Practice paraphrasing focus sentences from text
5. Synonyms
6. Individual paraphrasing of sentences
7. Oral sharing of what they have done and why

After the teaching sessions were concluded, the children were Post-tested in the following:-  
PM Benchmark Reading Record, Paraphrasing Test, Synonyms Test.

Results:

**Pre-Test: PROBE** The fine grading of the PM leveling makes it inappropriate to give a specific reading age to the individual levels between PM levels 1-14. Hence, no Post-Test PROBE results.

Student	Students Age	Reading Age	Reading Accuracy	Reading Comprehension
A	7yrs	5-6	91%	60%
B	7 yrs	5-6	91%	60%
C	7 yrs	6-7	93%	83%
D	7 yrs	5-6	81%	60%

**Pre-Test : PM Running Records**

Student	Students Age	Reading Level	Reading Accuracy	Reading Comprehension
A	7yrs	8	91%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
B	7 yrs	10	93%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
C	7 yrs	15	97%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
D	7 yrs	11	95%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions

**Post-Test : PM Running Records**

Student	Students Age	Reading Age	Reading Accuracy	Reading Comprehension
A	7yrs	12	95%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
B	7 yrs	12	95%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
C	7 yrs	18	92%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions
D	7 yrs	12	95%	Able to retell & answer all comprehension questions

**Pre-Test : Synonyms Task & Paraphrasing Test**

Student	Students Age	Synonyms Test	Paraphrasing Test
A	7yrs	3/29 words	3/9 sentences
B	7 yrs	3/29 words	5/9 sentences

<b>C</b>	7 yrs	8/29 words	5/9 sentences
<b>D</b>	7 yrs	1/29 words	4/9 sentences

### **Post-Test: Synonyms Task & Paraphrasing Test**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Students Age</b>	<b>Synonyms Test</b>	<b>Paraphrasing Test</b>
<b>A</b>	7yrs	14/29 words	8/9 sentences
<b>B</b>	7 yrs	16/29 words	8/9 sentences
<b>C</b>	7 yrs	14/29 words	9/9 sentences
<b>D</b>	7 yrs	14/29 words	9/9 sentences

### **Discussion:**

The results from this action research, supports the hypothesis that “the explicit teaching of paraphrasing, will improve the reading comprehension and oral retell of students”.

Over the course of the intervention, self-efficacy of each of the students had improved. During the teaching sessions, it became noticeable that all the students were becoming more confident and capable about what they were doing and why they were doing it. They were all eager to participate and towards the end of the sessions, they all displayed the ability of being able to self-monitor and were able to display that they had gained greater meaning from what they had read. The students became more independent workers, requiring less teacher guidance and input as the intervention progressed. This was more than likely due to the fact that the lessons and tasks were highly repetitive. Frequent repetition about what was to be done while reading e.g. read, ask what does it mean, find synonyms, put into your own words etc, tuned the students into the task. Students were asked at the beginning of each session to retell text read at the previous session, and what was noted, was improved levels of memory, together with better language flow in their retelling.

The group found it easier to paraphrase random sentences as opposed to a sentence that was apart of a paragraph from a story book. This may have been due to the fact that isolated sentences are void of any attached ideas. In their post-paraphrasing tests, student A and D actually changed the structure of two or three sentences and still retained the meaning.

I believe this intervention to be a success and the hypothesis to be true. Having said that, I also believe there is an underlying factor that needs to be credited for these successes. During this intervention, my teaching was extremely focused, very explicit. I did not divert from my teaching

focus during these sessions, yet I became aware that during some of my 'normal' lessons, they did become a little side tracked. The ultimate success of the intervention was equally due to the explicit and focused teaching and not just the content (synonyms and paraphrasing), taught. The ability to plan, identify and prioritize what needs to be taught is a skill that is essential in teaching. The need to teach most things simultaneously should be revised and the realization that explicit teaching is what students require for successful scaffolding to occur is needed.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Oral Retell Checklist

Appendix 2 – Paraphrasing Test

Appendix 3 – Teaching Plan

### Appendix 1:

#### Oral Retell Checklist - Comprehension

Where does the story take place?

When does the story take place?

Who are the main characters?

Who are the other main characters?

What was the problem in the story?

How did ..... try to solve the problem?

Was it hard to solve the problem?

Was the problem solved?

What did you learn by reading the story?

Can you think of a different ending?

What changes would you like to make to the story? Why?

### Appendix 2:

#### Paraphrasing Test

1. Ben ate a big red apple before dinner.
2. The small fluffy kitten ran under the bed.
3. The ugly old witch turned the dog into a mouse.
4. The sun was bright and a rainbow came out.
5. The dog ran really fast as he chased the car.
6. Mum made a cake and it looked yummy.
7. The tall man fell over and hurt his arm.
8. The angry teacher yelled at the naughty children.
9. The handsome prince married the beautiful princess.

### Appendix 3: Teaching Plan:

The aim of this intervention is to develop meaning through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing to improve reading comprehension and oral retell.

- This intervention has been designed for small instructional groups (4 children)
- Designed for Year 2 children
- Each session was approximately 30/45 minutes each (flexibility of time required)
- Total of 11 teaching sessions
- Intervention group remained in the class but work on the floor with the teacher.

### **Lesson Outline:**

#### Session 1:

1. Playing games – ‘20 Questions’ & ‘I spy’ **(15 minutes)**
2. Brainstorm definitions of what synonyms and paraphrasing are and write then and examples on the blackboard. **(15-20 minutes)**
3. Play ‘Celebrity Heads’ **(10 minutes)**

#### Session 2:

1. Teacher reads big book –‘The Little Red Hen’
2. Select sentences from the text written on sentence strips.

#### Procedure for each sentence as follows –

- Read focus sentences
  - Identify the words / synonyms
  - Ask-‘What do you think this means?’ Discuss
  - Ask-‘How could you say this in another way?’/ ‘What is another word you could use that still means the same?’
  - Discuss
  - Add to synonyms chart
  - Re-read sentence with synonyms in place
  - Ask- ‘How could you paraphrase this whole sentence now?’
  - Highlight the words that were changed
  - Re-read new sentence
3. Re-read text. Each student is asked to paraphrase each sentence strip.
  4. Group sharing of children’s sentences.
  5. Ask- ‘What did we do while reading?’ ‘What does this help us do?’
  6. Implement Oral Re-tell Checklist.

#### Session 3:

1. Teacher re-reads the big book –‘The Little Red Hen’
2. Revise definitions of synonyms and paraphrasing.
3. Students verbalize what they did in the previous lesson and how it helped. Read through synonyms chart.
4. Teacher reads new big book –‘The Gingerbread Man’
  - Read focus sentences
  - Identify the words / synonyms
  - Ask-‘What do you think this means?’
  - Discuss
  - Ask-‘How could you say this in another way?’/ ‘What is another word you could use that still means the same?’
  - Discuss
  - Add to synonyms chart
  - Re-read sentence with synonyms in place
  - Ask- ‘How could you paraphrase this whole sentence now?’
  - Highlight the words that were changed
  - Re-read new sentence
5. Re-read text. Each student is asked to paraphrase each sentence strip.
6. Group sharing of children’s sentences.
7. Ask- ‘What did we do while reading?’ ‘What does this help us do?’
8. Implement Oral Re-tell Checklist.

### Session 4-11:

Sessions 4-11 all follow the same format as the previous lessons using the following big books:

- Session 4: ‘Chicken Little’
- Session 5: ‘The Tree Billy Goats Gruff’
- Session 6: ‘Little Red Riding Hood’
- Session 7: ‘The Ugly Duckling’
- Session 8: ‘Hansel & Gretel’
- Session 9: ‘Saggy Baggy Elephant’
- Session 10: ‘The Three Bears’
- Session 11: ‘Cinderella’

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