" Developing meaning at the sentence level through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve comprehension."

ABSTRACT

The aim of this project was to assist a Gr.4 student who had been highlighted as at risk in the area of literacy. This student, over the course of school life, had not been a part of any reading intervention programs , as there had not been any indication that the student was at risk. However, over the course of grades 3 and 4, results from testing at the beginning of 2003, and limited progress within the classroom was a cause for concern. There had been no extenuating circumstances for this. The student's difficulty with comprehending read texts within the classroom was highlighted as an issue. The student, even though able to decode, was unable to attain meaning from what had been read.

To assist this student and other students in being independent operators on text, the aim of this research was to test the following hypothesis:

"Developing meaning at the sentence level through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve comprehension."

The explicit teaching of paraphrasing and developed use of synonyms, to enhance the strategy of paraphrasing, improved the student's ability to gain greater meaning at the sentence level and therefore, at the text level.

- The program ran for 10 sessions.
- The teacher modelled how to paraphrase, taught its purpose and developed use of synonyms.
- The student learnt to verbalise new strategy and the "why" of its importance as a reader.
- Assessment before the intervention and again at the end of the intervention showed an improved level of comprehension.
- This implies that explicit teaching of paraphrasing can assist and or develop comprehension improvement.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to decode and comprehending what has been read does not always equate. Reading with understanding involves the smooth co-ordination of higher order cognitive processes (thinking, reasoning, analysing, connecting, reflecting) and lower order processes (word recognition, decoding) (Westwood 2001). It is therefore possible to be operating at one level and not at the other, or to be operating ineffectively at one or both. It does however say to us that a child's text reading, their ability to decode, can mask their inability to construct meaning from what has been read and because of this they actually become poor readers – poor translators of print

to meaning. Poor readers do not acquire strategies automatically and need explicit instructions (Gee, H. 1998).

Being able to read a sentence and attain meaning at that level, or any level, does not therefore just always happen and that for this to occur for some students it requires some explicit teaching. They need to know what it is they have to do, to be able to make sense of what they have read. Reading, and then being able to transfer the ideas of what has been read into their own thoughts confirms that what has been read has been understood. 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 verbalise is a strategy to assist poor comprehenders to comprehend.

The effectiveness of teaching paraphrasing and then verbalising , as a strategy to enhance comprehension , enables the child to self monitor, become active listeners and attain meaning (Hellekson ,L. and Feilter, F. 1994).

This investigation therefore, aims to confirm such research and show that developing meaning at the sentence level through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve comprehension.

METHOD

This study used an OXO design. Each lesson followed a procedure similar to the Munro's Comprehension Intervention Format: Paraphrasing, as outlined in the course. The student was assessed to establish an entry level of competency in comprehension. Using PROBE – reading assessment (2002) a reading age was also established. This enabled an assessment of reading accuracy and reading comprehension.

The student was then taught through an intervention program how to paraphrase. This involved developing knowledge and use of synonyms and verbalising, 'what I need to do'.

The teacher facilitated the explicit instruction throughout the intervention, modelling and cueing the student in the effective use of paraphrasing. Throughout the intervention the teacher worked strategically to scaffold the new learning.

At the conclusion of the intervention the student's reading comprehension was again assessed using PROBE. The results were then compared.

PARTICIPANTS

The participant was a Gr. 4 male, age 10. Based on Reading Recovery levels he was able to read level 28+ and had achieved this by the end of Gr.2. This is a benchmark level for the end of Gr.2.

Whilst able to decode, he was now experiencing immense difficulty comprehending what had been. Operating ineffectively within the classroom situation. Analysis of

testing (PROBE) on an informational text showed his reading accuracy to be 96%, but analysis of comprehension on that same piece was only 25%. Again, on a fictional text he scored 97% accuracy, but analysis of comprehension scored 50%. Reading age was determined as 8-9 years.

The participant was withdrawn from the classroom to form a small group of five children. Each session was for 30 minutes.

MATERIALS

Texts: Picture story books
  - The Wide Mouthed Frog (Faulkner & Lambert)
  - The Puzzled Penguin (Faulkner & Lambert)
  - The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing and Other Fables from Aesop (Literacy   Links)
  - Aesop's Fables (Brimax Classics)

Eight fable stories were chosen. These were used for the eight intervention lessons. The two picture storybooks were used for pre-intervention oral focus activities and vocabulary development (synonyms).

The fable texts were graded on the Fry's Readability Scale (Fry 1977) at mid grade 3 level. These texts were supported by use of picture.
Cue cards were used to help student recall self help strategies.
Thesaurus, used when working on synonyms.
PROBE, reading assessment (Triune Initiatives 2002)
Oral Retell Checklists – completed by the teacher at the conclusion of each session. (Appendix)

PROCEDURE

The student was withdrawn from the classroom for 10 sessions to work in a small group situation. This was to allow for the student to feel comfortable about being withdrawn. The sessions ran for 30 minutes. These were carried out during the literacy block over 5 weeks. An assessment session took place prior to intervention and an assessment session took place at the conclusion of the 10 sessions.

The first two sessions had an oral focus. The students listened to a picture storybook. Story retell from group. Review story highlighting particular sentences within the story,
 e.g. "A little penguin plodded along, shivering through the thick snow."
How could you say this in your own words?
What other words could we use instead of **little,** but still mean the same. What other words could we use instead of **plodded** or **shivering** or **thick**, etc.?
The Thesaurus was used to assist.
Now say it in your own words, "A small penguin walked …"
This procedure was followed for both picture storybook sessions.

The following eight sessions preceded as thus:
1.Text re-tell (previous session)
2.Read together (practise paraphrasing)
3.Synonyms
4.Reading Target Words (new passage)
5.Writung Target Words (new passage)
6.Paraphrasing
7.Oral Share - What l have learnt

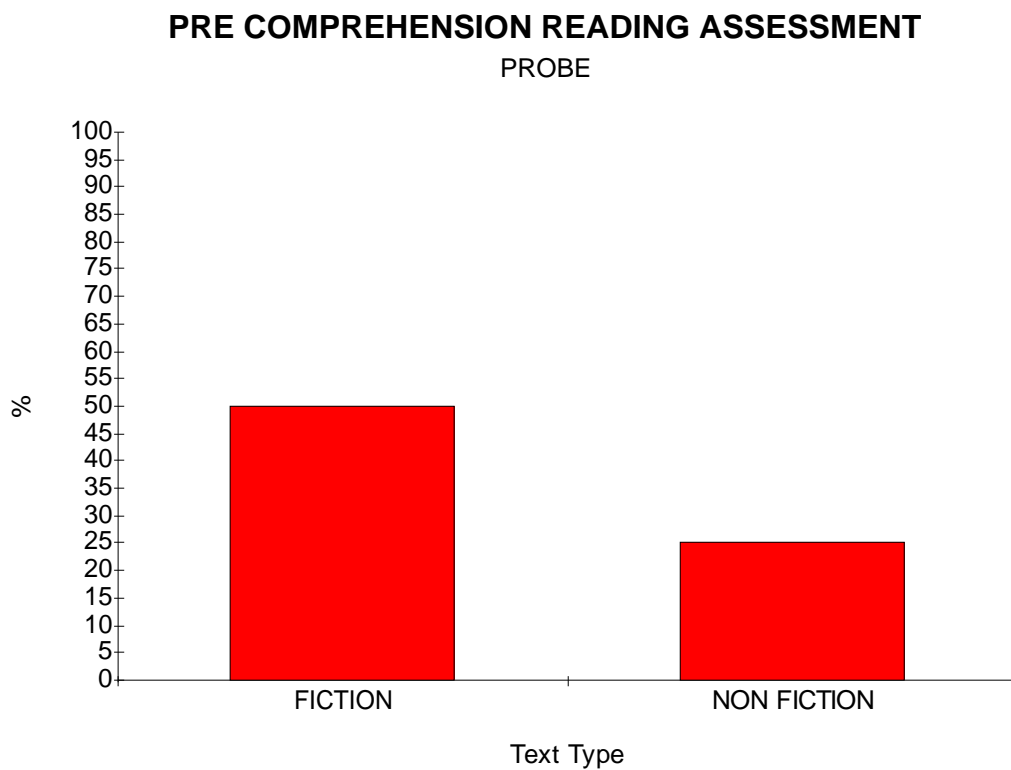At the conclusion of the 10 sessions, Post –testing of the student (PROBE)

RESULTS

PRE COMPREHENSION READING ASSESSMENT
PROBE

Fig. 1

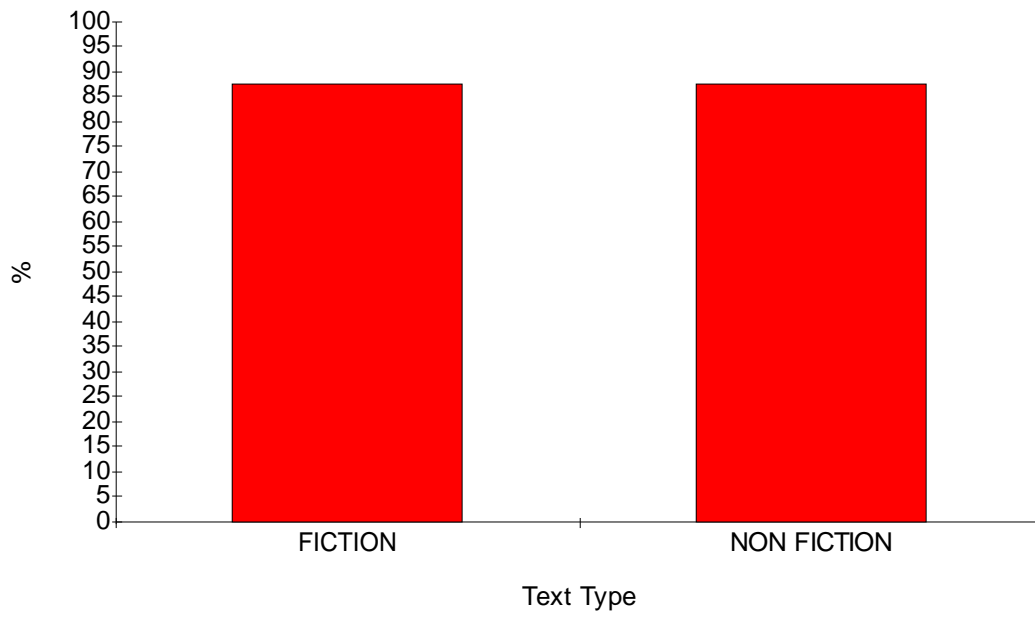**POST COMPREHENSION READING ASSESSMENT**
PROBE

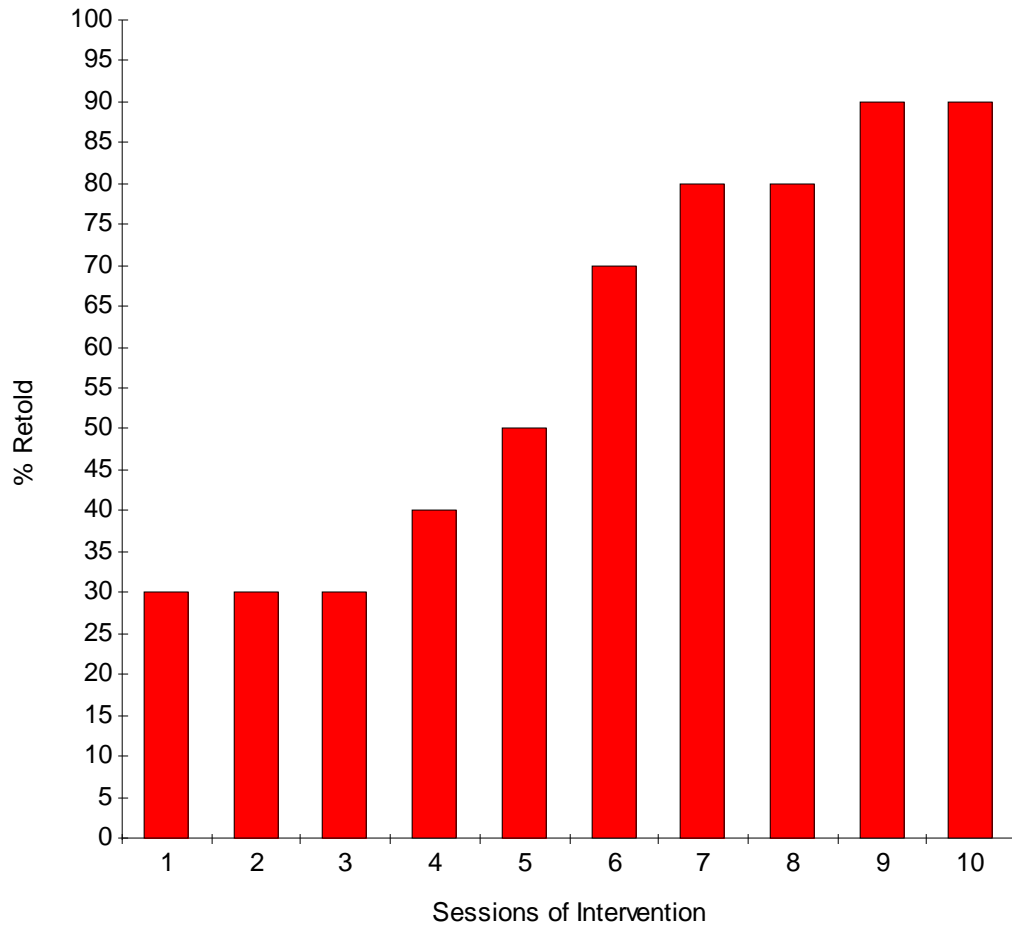
Fig. 2

ORAL RETELL GRAPH
Checklists

Fig. 3

Data analysed in graphic form displays the improved comprehension performance of the student after the intervention. Figure 1. Shows the comprehension starting point before intervention. The determined Reading Age:8-9yrs. Figure 2 shows the outcome at the end of the intervention. Determined Reading Age:8.5-9.5yrs.

Figure 3. measures the student's comprehension through oral retell conducted by the teacher at the conclusion of each session.

These outcomes confirm the hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this project support the initial hypothesis, that developing meaning at the sentence level through the explicit teaching of paraphrasing will improve comprehension.

Over the sessions it became obvious that the explicit reinforcement enabled the student to be very clear in his mind about what he was doing to help himself and how he was doing it.

This confirms the earlier stated theory that paraphrasing enables the child to self-monitor and therefore become better readers as they are able to gain greater meaning from what has been read (Hellekson,L. and Feilter,F. 1994).

Another significant factor was the improved self efficacy of the student. His view of himself as a reader had altered considerably over the course of the intervention. His interaction with the students and the teacher displayed a very positive attitude. He was in control of his achievements.

The testing at the end of the intervention showed an improvement in comprehension ability. The challenge will be to see if the implementation of these now known self help strategies remains in place. Will the student continue to progress, remain in a phase of maintenance or digress?

The success of this research was related to the success of the student involved and to possibility that developing paraphrasing is a strategy of intervention to assist many other similar students.

This also has implications for the classroom teacher, because for explicit learning to occur teaching needs to be explicit. If students experience difficulty in being able to extract meaning from what they've read, we as teachers must try to assist by explicitly teaching to that need. In this intervention the strategy of paraphrasing, taught in pre-determined and focussed measures, assisted the student to comprehend better.

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<u>APPENDICES</u>

Appendix 1. – Oral Retell / proforma

Appendix 2. – Teaching Procedures / Plan

Appendix 1

ORAL RETELL CHECKLIST – Comprehension

Teacher assessed

/ or X

1.Where does the story take place?
2.When does the story take place?
3.Who are the main characters?
4.Who are the other important characters?
5.What was the problem in the story?
6.How did ------ try to solve the problem?
7.Was it hard to solve the problem?
8.Was the problem solved?
9.What did you learn by reading the story?
10.Can you think of a different ending?

Appendix 2

The aim of this teaching unit:
To improve use of paraphrasing strategies to enhance sentence level comprehension.
This links into Munro's model at intervention at the sentence level, assisting students
to visualise, re-read, question develop 'how to' strategies.

*Unit designed for small group instruction (5-6)

*Unit designed for Gr.4

*30 minute sessions

*10 sessions in unit

*Students withdrawn from classroom.

SESSION 1.

Method:

1. Read; _The Wide-Mouthed Frog_ (Faulkner and Lambert)

2. Select sentences from pages 4, 6, 8
   Write these sentences out on strips of cardboard. Begin with one strip at time and follow this procedure for each one:
   *Read sentence
   *What do you think this means?
   *Discuss
   *How could you say that in your own words?
   *Highlight the main topic words in the sentence
   *What other words could you use that still mean the same?
     These are synonyms, e.g. pointy – sharp, delicious – yummy
   *Use Thesaurus if needed.
   *Share new sentence – group task

2. Re-read text, as the teacher approaches the pages from which the focus sentences were taken, a student from the group is asked to paraphrase with their own.

3. Implement Oral Retell Checklist

SESSION 2.

Method:

1. Read: _The Puzzled Penguin_ (Faulkner and Lambert)

2. Select sentences from pages 1, 5, 7

3. Write these sentences out on strips of cardboard. Begin with one strip at a time and follow this procedure for each one:
   *Read sentence
   *What do you think this means?
   *Discuss
   *How could you say this in your own words?
   *Highlight the main topic words in the sentence
   *What other words could you use that still mean the same?
     What do we call these words?   Synonyms
     e.g. , shivering – shaking, little – small, tiny
   *Use the Thesaurus if needed.
   *Each student creates their own paraphrase for each sentence strip card.
   *Share with the group.

4. Re-read text, as the teacher reads the page from which the focus sentences were taken, students take it in turn to paraphrase with their own.

5. Implement Oral Retell Checklist

SESSION 3

Method:

1. Text retell – *'The Puzzled Penguin'* (Faulkner and Lambert)

2. Text reading from previous text. Go back over the paraphrasing from previous session. Read focus sentence from text. Say it in your own words.

3. Synonyms – cue the students into use of synonyms from last sessions. How did it help? What did you do? What words did you replace?

4. Read New Text (teacher) – *'The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing'*- Aesop Fable
Write onto cards key content words from story to use for lesson. Sort words which could be used in place of words in the story. These are synonyms, e.g. sheepfold – pen, paddock
Shepherd – farmer, owner

5. Write up these words

6. Read text together. Before starting students need to verbalise how paraphrasing is going to assist them when they read. Read a sentence. Now put it in your own words.

7. Oral Share Time
"What have I learnt today?"
Allow each student to contribute.

8. Implement Oral Retell Checklist

SESSION 4

Method:

1. Text retell – *The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing* – Aesop Fable

2. Text reading from previous lesson. Go back over the paraphrasing from previous session.

3. Synonyms – cue the students into use of synonyms. How did it help? What did you do? What words did you replace?

4. Read new text – '*The Frogs who wanted a King.*'-Aesop Fable. Write onto cards key content words from the story to use for the lesson. Sort words which could be used in place of words in the story. These are synonyms, e.g. marsh-swamp, satisfied-happy, etc.

5. Write up these words.

6. Read text together. Before starting, students need to verbalise how paraphrasing is going to assist them when they read. Read a sentence. Now put it in your own words.

7. Oral Share Time – "What have I learnt today?" Allow each student to contribute.

8. Implement Oral Retell Checklist

SESSIONS 5 to 10

Follow this exact same format as outlined in SESSION 3 and 4
Texts used are from Literacy Links – *The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing/Aesop's Fables*

SESSION 5 – The Bundle of Sticks
SESSION 6 – Hungry but Free
SESSION 7 – Coyote and Goat
SESSION 8 – The Fox and the Stork

The texts for Sessions 9 and 10 are from: *Aesop's Fables* (Brimax)

SESSION 9 – The Hare and the Tortoise
SESSION 10 – The Lion and the Mouse.