

Action Research Task

HYPOTHESIS Explicit teaching of self- talk to two Year 2 students, before reading, that targets personal reading strengths improves their self- efficacy as readers.

ABSTRACT The study undertaken focused on two Year 2 students who were not making desirable progress in all aspects of reading. It was believed that, with the Intervention measures already experienced by the children, greater progress should have been demonstrated. It was obvious from the way they presented for reading activities that they had no expectation of great success. They were passive participants who used reading prompts offered but would initiate very limited self- help behaviour.

Reading is a complex process that involves active involvement on many levels for success to be achieved. We draw on our previous knowledge of life experiences and reading experiences to achieve success. If our reading successes have been limited and we aren't sure of how to use our life experiences, then our chances of being successful at reading are going to be reduced.

The aim of the current research was to help the two students to see themselves as active readers who could identify and call on different strategies to help themselves when reading. The

Intervention tasks involved positive self- talk before reading, focusing on specific reading strategies, to enable them to achieve more success when reading and to therefore improve their self- efficacy as readers.

The present study used small group focused teaching over a period of three weeks with four sessions per week. These twelve sessions were of 30- 45 minutes duration, session 1 and 12 being made up of a self- efficacy checklist, running record and journal use. A WORD, TOPIC, SENTENCE or DISPOSITIONAL strategy was focused on in each of the other sessions.

The results of this Intervention demonstrated that positive self- talk, when specifically linked to personal reading strengths was successful in improving the reading outcome for these two Year 2 students. Posters were made of the different strategies the children were able to identify for future use in reading tasks so as to encourage the students to continue to be active participants in their reading.

INTRODUCTION The two Year 2 students who are the focus of this action research study have had many Interventions to help them improve their reading standard. Student A was included in the Reading Recovery Program in Year 1 and has worked with the help of a Teacher Aid from early Prep. Student B has not had specific extra support other than what naturally occurs in groupings in the classroom. Both

students have worked with a Teacher Aid during reading and writing blocks in Year 2.

Students quickly identify themselves as having difficulties in achieving at tasks when they compare themselves with their peers. This can often create a sense of inadequacy in them and a dependency on others to help them 'fix' the reading problem. This is very evident in the two students in this study. Both have been taught many strategies to help them decode text over their time at school, however are often bewildered by which strategy to use.

In an article entitled 'Motivation and Cognitive Strategy Use in Reading and Writing' for The University of Michigan Combined Program in Education and Psychology, 1992, Eric M. Anderman states 'special education students feel less efficacious in literacy activities, have the lowest expectations for success at reading and writing, and use surface processing strategies more often than not at risk...they have the lowest self- concept of ability at reading and writing, and use deep cognitive strategies less than not at risk...the at risk students feel less efficacious, have lower experiences of success, and use more surface strategies than not at risk students...aspects which encourage students to adopt learning focused goals and positive affect towards literacy may have positive effects on students' use of certain types of cognitive strategies.' By skilling these students with a planned approach to tackling reading activities for themselves, their beliefs about themselves as readers should show positive improvement.

It is not enough to simply build their self-esteem; students also need to be taught specific skills in order to take their learning to new levels. Sharon Begley, Wall Street Journal: New York, N.Y.: Apr 18, 2003 says ‘an intervention that encourages them to feel good about themselves regardless of work may remove the reason to work hard—resulting in poorer performance,’ suggest psychologist Roy Baumeister and colleagues in a monograph to be published in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. If you feel good without learning...equations why bother? Boosting self-esteem without helping people learn more or perform better does not bring higher achievement at school or work. One solid link does seem to exist between higher self-esteem and performance. The higher your opinion of yourself, the more likely you are to persist in the face of failure.’ Having learnt specific skills students need to also be taught to assess the suitability of the strategy they are employing to solve a reading difficulty. In Becoming an Engaged, Self-Regulated Reader; Theory Into Practice; Columbus; Spring 2002; Sherri I Horner; Craig S Shwery volume 41, issue 2, start page 102

‘Poor readers tend to focus on a handful of strategies they use regardless of the particular reading situation. They have difficulties monitoring whether these strategies are working; therefore they can persist in using a strategy that is not effective for a particular situation. This can cause them to become discouraged and give up, decreasing their self-efficacy and motivation to read.’ It is one thing to have students feeling good about themselves as readers and able to employ varied strategies when decoding text, it is entirely another thing for

them to be analytical readers, able to use, discard and re-use various strategies during the reading process. There is no point in them always relying on a grab bag of reading strategies that they always employ, without any consideration of what might be specific to a particular reading problem. Marie Clay in Becoming Literate: The Construction of Inner Control, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991 tells us, 'Competent readers construct a flexible system of strategies for dealing with text, while poor readers often rely on a limited repertoire of strategies, P323'. We not only have to teach our students strategies to use to help themselves become better readers, but we also need to teach them when to use different strategies. When students positively talk to themselves prior to reading, verbalizing what they are going to do when decoding text, they are taking control of their learning, reminding themselves of what they can do to improve their reading outcome. Building up lists of known strategies that can be employed prior to beginning reading fosters this self-talk. Adding to these lists of known strategies in subsequent reading sessions builds up a positive atmosphere for reading success for the individual child.

By the time a student with reading difficulties is in Year 2, their self-esteem is low when confronted with reading tasks. No amount of positive talk is going to improve this self-esteem when reading without giving the students skills to improve. Patrick P McCabe and Howard Margolis in 'Enhancing the Self-Efficacy of Struggling Readers; The Clearing House; Washington; Sep/Oct 2001 believe that 'Part of teaching children with reading problems is convincing them that they

can learn to read, in spite of their experience to the contrary. (Stahl 1998, 183) Such negative beliefs adversely affect their motivation to read and often become the most powerful obstacle that teachers face in helping those students become better readers. To reverse these self- defeating beliefs, teachers must understand and directly address students' self- efficacy doubts.... Self- efficacy is the personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a particular task. Students who believe that they cannot learn to read despite making a considerable effort have low self- efficacy for reading; those who believe that they will become good readers if they make modest effort have high self- efficacy for reading. Students whose self- efficacy for reading is low often resist reading or apathetically go through the motions of learning to read...Thus, it is critical to help struggling readers develop an accurate belief that they can do well in reading if they make the effort to learn and apply what they are taught. ...To help struggling readers become proficient, highly motivated readers, teachers must continuously work to help change students "can't do" attitudes about reading into "can do" attitudes. ...Employ self- attribution strategies. Make frequent comments to students that attribute their success with instructional and independent- level materials to their effort, persistence, and use of appropriate strategies...Ask students to verbalize the reasons for their success.' Thus it is vital that we give them the skills to be successful. By approaching the reading process with planned strategies in mind, the student's chance of success is more likely and therefore positive feelings about themselves as readers are fostered.

The present investigation aimed to teach students with reading difficulties to self-talk before beginning reading tasks to see if this improved their self-efficacy as readers. It specifically focused on self-talk as a self-help strategy for improving reading. It was believed that as their self-efficacy as readers improves, so would their reading outcomes.

Prediction- positive self-talk based on what the students can do to help themselves in their reading tasks, linked with the teaching of specific reading strategies and recalling of strategies remembered will result in improved self-efficacy as readers.

METHOD This action research uses a case study OXO design in which the gain in self-efficacy is monitored for two Year 2 students who have reading difficulties. The participants are two reluctant to read students who have a history of reading difficulties. Both participants are in the same primary school classroom, and both are 8 years of age. The Intervention Tasks were taken in the classroom as part of a normal classroom reading activity. When tested using a Running Record both students were at Level 20, Instructional. The majority of their peers were at Level 28 Instructional or Easy, with 4 at between Level 24 and Level 26.

An initial reading Self-Efficacy Survey and Running Record was conducted followed by the Intervention. Following the Intervention the Self-Efficacy Survey and Running Record were again administered.

The Intervention consisted of twelve lessons, focusing on specific reading skills. Three lessons were focused on WORD strategies, three on SENTENCE strategies, two on TOPIC strategies and two on DISPOSITION strategies. The children kept a journal of strategies known and added to these at each session. They were encouraged to verbalize what they knew at all times to aid in the reading process.

SESSION 1 - Running record
 - Self- Efficacy Survey
 - 'Before I begin to read I' written in journal

SESSION 2, 3 & 4 - 'Before I begin to read I', building up knowledge and confidence of strategies previously learnt. Strategies recalled written into journal
 - Focus on a WORD strategy whilst reading a text, praising whenever the strategy focused on is used. WORD strategies used- letter clusters, word banks, segmenting words
 - Discuss 'Did this help?' Responses recorded into journals

SESSION 5, 6 & 7 - 'Before I begin to read I', building up knowledge and confidence of strategies learnt. Strategies recalled written into journal
 - Focus on a SENTENCE strategy whilst reading a text, praising whenever the strategy focused on is used. SENTENCE strategies used- phrasing, paraphrasing and visualizing.

- Discuss 'Did this help?' Responses recorded into journals

SESSION 8 & 9 - 'Before I begin to read I', building up knowledge and confidence of strategies learnt. Strategies recalled written into journal

- Focus on a TOPIC strategy whilst reading a text, praising whenever the strategy focused on is used. TOPIC strategies used- main ideas and supporting ideas, summarizing

- Discuss 'Did this help?' Responses recorded into journals

SESSION 10 & 11 - 'Before I begin to read I', building up knowledge and confidence of strategies learnt. Strategies recalled written into journal

- Focus on a DISPOSITIONAL strategy whilst reading a text, praising whenever the strategy focused on is used. DISPOSITIONAL strategies used- what did the writer want us to think?

- Discuss 'Did this help?' Responses recorded into journals

SESSION 12 - Running Record

- Self- Efficacy Survey

- 'Before I begin to read I' written in journal

RESULTS Two children in the study found great benefit in recalling what they were going to do to help themselves when

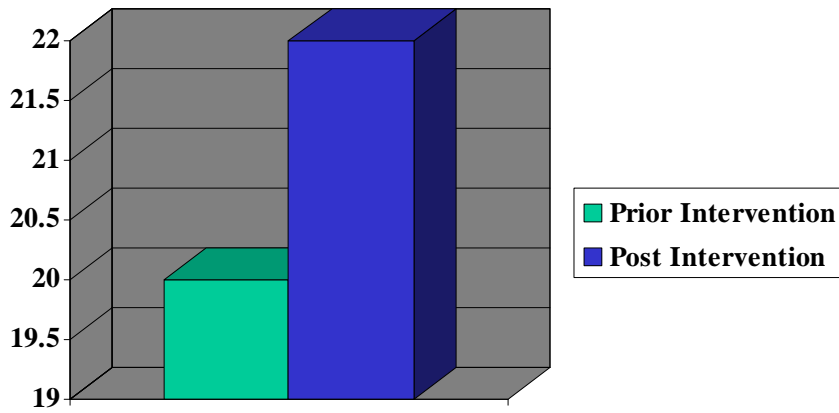
reading. The reading tasks focused on better enabled them to recall what they already knew about letter clusters, visualizing etc and to build on that knowledge. As they were able to recall more and more things that they could do to help themselves their attitude to reading text improved. They felt they had greater control over the reading process instead of the reading process always being guided by a teacher or a teacher aide. They were impressed with their ever- growing list of self- help strategies and began discussing amongst themselves which strategy to use where. Over the period involved in the Intervention, which was over a period of 4 days a week for 3 weeks, their reading level rose from Level 20 Instructional to Level 22 Instructional for child A and 23 Instructional for child B. This was seen as a great gain as they had reached a plateau of Level 20 for a period of 5 weeks. Their willingness to read independently improved, with child B borrowing from the library before school so that she would have something new to read at home besides her set Take Home Reading Book. Child A, who was a reading refusal child when at home began to read to his parents, asking them to not help him with unknown text as he wanted to show them what he could remember to do to help himself. He would only read a few pages a night but he was reading, and pleased with his efforts. The resulting change in their Self- Efficacy Checklist score indicated that they were feeling much more confident as readers and much happier to tackle reading tasks. The challenge for the future is to maintain this improved self- image. It is hoped that as they see the gains they are making in their reading ability, that this will provide them with the continued motivation that they need.

Session 1 saw both students acknowledge that they knew exactly what to do when participating in a Running Record. They weren't very enthusiastic but knew that this was something that we did in order to learn more about what they did when they read. Their Self- Efficacy Checklist scores indicated that they did not gain much enjoyment from reading. When asked to talk about, then write down 'Before I begin to read I

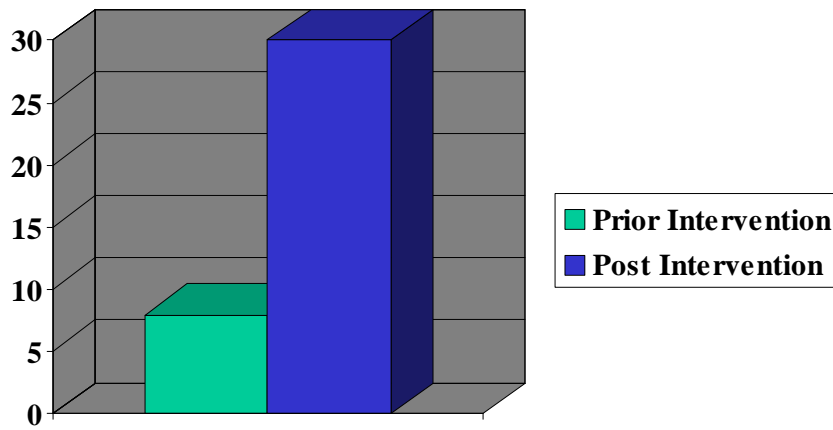
child A's response was limited to 'I can sound it out', 'I can read it again' and 'I can ask for help'. Child B's responses were limited to 'I can sound it out', 'I can look for little words that I already know' and 'I can read the sentence again'. It is interesting to note that neither child employed the self- help strategies that they identified when involved in the Running Record other than sounding out letter by letter. It was obvious that a page full of text was overwhelming for them and that they required encouragement to use the reading strategies that they had identified and those that they knew but hadn't initially identified.

Session 12 saw the two children present with a much more positive attitude, eager to show what they had learnt about themselves and reading. Often during the teaching sessions the children would acknowledge that they had already known the strategy focused on but had 'forgotten that they knew it'. Strategies not focused on, but known anyway were also recalled. Their sense of helplessness was decreased as they learnt more and more things that they could do to ensure that they were skilled readers. The self- help strategies identified ranged from say the word slowly, sounding out the chunks of letters to re- reading and checking to see what makes sense.

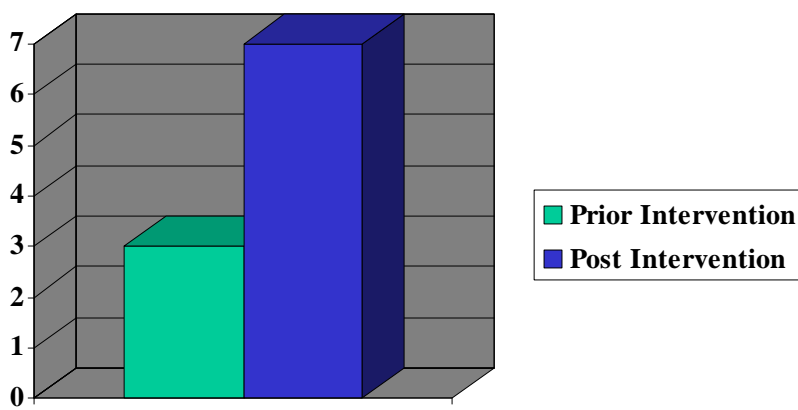
Reading Level – Child A



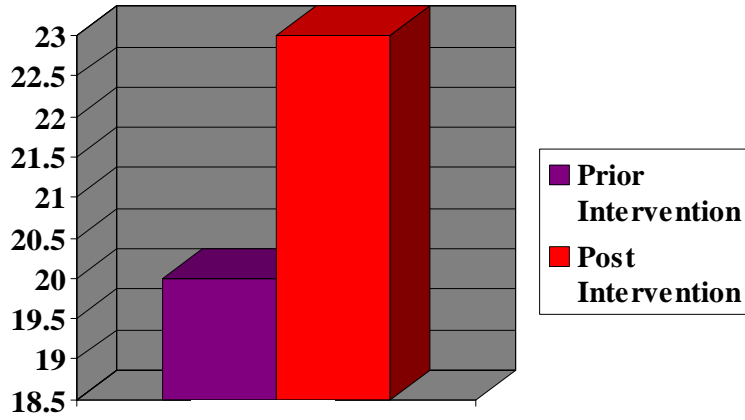
Self-Efficacy Checklist – Child A



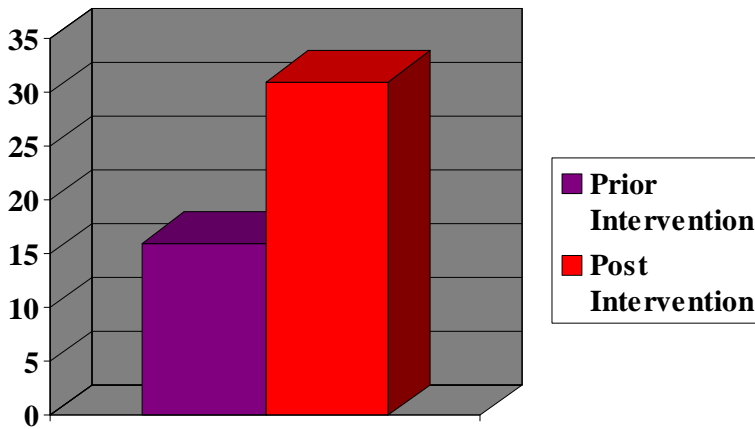
'Before I begin to read I...' responses – Child A



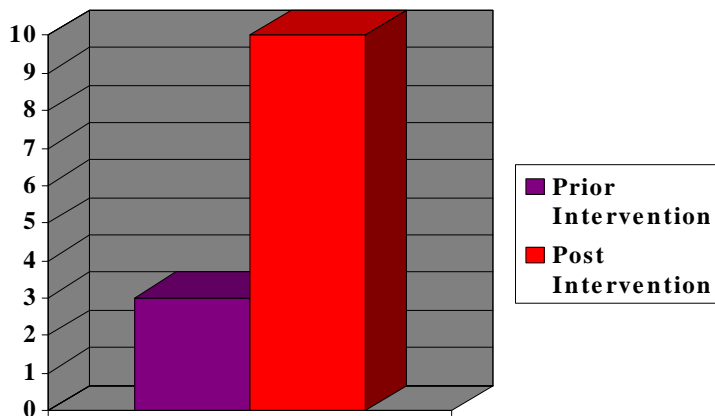
Reading Level – Child B



Self-Efficacy Checklist – Child B



'Before I begin to read I...' responses – Child B



DISCUSSION Many children are unable to identify reading strategies that can help them as readers. They do not have the self-talk that would enable them to target their personal reading strengths. Sherril Horner and Craig S Shwery, in *Becoming an Engaged, Self-Regulated Reader; Theory Into Practice, Columbus; Spring 2002* discuss students who use a handful of strategies to decode text, regardless of whether they are appropriate or not. They conclude that when success is not achieved students become more and more discouraged. This was certainly so with the two case study students. It is not enough, however to build their self-esteem without building learning pathways for them to improve. Sharon Begley in the *Wall Street Journal Apr 18, 2003* tells us that we can build self-esteem to such a point that the students can feel so good about themselves that they are not bothered by their lack of success. This is not a desirable outcome and the Intervention aimed to build self-esteem through success based on specific taught strategies that the students would identify prior to reading new text. Inflated self-esteem, that is not firmly based on a solid foundation, is not likely to be long lasting, improved self-esteem. The Intervention was designed in such a way that the two students would develop an enhanced self-esteem through success in a supportive environment.

The Intervention was successful, I believe because both students did have a knowledge of what good readers do to help themselves but found the whole process overwhelming as they had observed their peers achieving more and more success whilst they struggled to sort out one strategy from the other. By verbalizing what they could do and practising when

and where to use different strategies the children felt empowered.

The Intervention's success was enhanced by the fact that the tasks were completed as part of a 'normal' reading workshop. They were not being withdrawn from the room for special work, a practise not employed in the classroom for other students. As the self- help reading chart was added to as a reference for all students to use, the target students felt a welcome sense of achievement that could be applauded by all. The WORD and SENTENCE strategies focused on were identified by the students as the strategies most helpful. The deeper analysis involved in TOPIC and DISPOSITIONAL strategies were not seen to be as helpful. This will need to be developed in future focused reading tasks.

It will be vital to closely monitor the progress of both students. Child B is most likely to maintain her improved self- esteem and resulting improvement in reading achievement. Child A is going to need continued motivation to remain focused on reading. For the time being the focus is going to be on books closely related to sport. We will supplement this reading with articles from newspapers to keep him motivated and progressing. This way family members can enjoy the reading process along with him as he comes from a family of five, sport crazy boys.

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Appendix

Self- efficacy checklist

	Not at all (1point)	Not much (2 points)	Sometimes (3 points)	A lot of the time (4 points)	Always (5 points)
I enjoy reading by myself at home					
I enjoy reading to mum or dad					
I enjoy reading by myself in class					
I enjoy choosing books for reading					
I enjoy reading lessons at school					
I enjoy being read to in class					
I enjoy visiting the school library					

Lesson Sequence

activity focus	task description	time
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running record • Self- Efficacy Survey • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal 	10 mins 10 mins 10 mins
2. WORD LEVEL letter clusters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on identified letter clusters from the text. Find other words in text and in classroom with focused letter clusters • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text, vocalizing what they did to help decode text and record in journals 	5 mins 15 mins 10 mins 10 mins
3. WORD LEVEL word banks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on recording the words that the children are 	5 mins 10 mins

	<p>likely to read in the text. Play word games to help children to remember new vocabulary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text vocalizing what they did to help decode text and record in journals 	<p>10mins s 10 mins</p>
<p>4. WORD LEVEL segmenting words</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on segmenting words found in the story in order to decode them • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text and record in journals 	<p>5 mins 10 mins 10 mins 10 mins</p>

<p>5. SENTENCE LEVEL phrasing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on how we phrase what we read can help us to understand what we read. Practise reading some sentences with unknown text in them and attempt to decode words using our understanding of what we have read to predict what the word is likely to be • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text vocalizing what they did to help decode text and record in journals 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p>
<p>6. SENTENCE LEVEL paraphrasing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on repeating a piece of text read, in own words to demonstrate understanding and then using this understanding to predict what unknown text is likely to be • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text vocalizing what they did to help decode text and record in journals. 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p>

<p>7. SENTENCE LEVEL visualizing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce and orient text, focusing on visualizing what is likely to be happening in the story. Emphasize colours and features that the children can see in their heads. Following this visualizing, build up a list of likely vocabulary for the book • Read text • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text vocalizing what they did to help decode text and record in journals 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p>
<p>8. TOPIC LEVEL main ideas and supporting ideas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce text and children read to themselves, paying particular attention to identifying the main ideas and supporting ideas. List these on white board at end of reading • Re- read text to teacher, 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p>

	<p>attempting unfamiliar vocabulary using the knowledge gained from discussing the main and supporting ideas to more accurately predict/decode text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss how children feel about how they read the text, paying particular attention to whether they feel they could decode more unfamiliar text after focusing on the main and supporting ideas and record their thoughts in journals	<p>10 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p>
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<p>9. TOPIC LEVEL summarizing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce text and children read to themselves, at the completion of reading children draw three cartoons summarizing what the story was about. • Re- read text to teacher • Discuss how children feel about how they read the text after the cartoon summarizing activity. Were they able to identify unfamiliar text with more success? Record thoughts in journals 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p>
<p>10. DISPOSITIONAL LEVEL what did the writer want us to think?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Before I begin to read I’ written in journal • Introduce the text and children read to themselves, at the completion of reading children draw a picture of how the book made them feel and using the illustrations talk about what the author was trying to make them think 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss what the children have learnt about text. Were they able to identify unfamiliar text with more success? Record thoughts in journals	15 mins
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<p>11. DISPOSITIONAL LEVEL what did the writer want us to think?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Before I begin to read I • Introduce the text and children read to themselves, at the completion of reading children draw a picture of how the book made them feel and using the illustrations talk about what the author was trying to make them think • Discuss what the children have learnt about text. Did they feel the same way as the author? Were they able to identify unfamiliar text with more success? Record thoughts in journals 	<p>5 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p> <p>15 mins</p>
<p>12.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running record • Self- Efficacy Survey • 'Before I begin to read I 	<p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p> <p>10 mins</p>

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