Abstract

The aim of this project was to design a program for a student who had had intensive reading intervention but had failed to make significant improvement in his reading. The student had limited language and was from an ESL background.

The research review provided two main emphases, first that children who had books read to them from an early age had a significant advantage when being taught to read. Furthermore language disorder, ESL and low achieving children also benefited from this process. Second a "reciprocal teaching" method has significant benefits in teaching students the meta cognitive skills necessary for comprehension.

The program ran for eight sessions with the teacher reading picture books and the student predicting and summarising the text, then the student read his own text and predicted and summarised. The results indicate that predicting and viewing the text before reading makes a significant difference to the student's comprehension. It also allowed the student to link the text to his own life experience. It also assisted the student to improve his confidence as a reader. This method had great possibilities for use with emergent or reluctant readers especially those from an ESL background.

Introduction

A number of students in the middle level of the school (Years 3 & 4) are failing to develop the necessary skills needed to independently read more complex text. This group of students has received the regular classroom reading instruction, had additional support with reading and also had an intense individualised program (Reading Recovery). However even after all this intervention the student's reading ability has only made marginal improvement (i.e. Reading recovery levels 5-8). These students continue to have support in the middle school but their reading ability either remains the same or dips backwards.

There are many possible factors that could account for these students poor level of reading performance.

- lack of prior knowledge and experience of the topic
- lack of knowledge of the language and oral language skills
- poor decoding and graphophonic ability
- lack of self-esteem and preparedness to attempt to read.

All these and many more combine to create students who have significant reading problems.

In looking at the complex skill which we call reading there are a multitude of composite skills that a person uses to obtain meaning from text. These skills can be grouped into the major areas of: graphophonic and phonemic skills that are the basic mechanism for decoding; semantic knowledge which is part of the lexical memory and knowledge of grammar and structure of the language that hold keys to meaning. Then there is the experience and prior knowledge that is brought to the reading task

and the reader's attitude that is the result of success and or level of interest as well as the reader's sensory skills.

In the MLOTP model (Munro 2002) that has been adopted these various processes are broken down into four main areas.

1)   information processing at word. sentence, concept topic and dispositional levels

2)   self management and control strategies

3)   the existing knowledge both language and experiential and

4)   the sensory input.

From this model it is obvious that to successfully operate in any of these areas the reader's language (in this case English) ability is crucial. Consequently the student's lack of language skills will severely limit any intense work aimed at developing the student's reading ability. Therefore the goal of this project is to improve students' language knowledge and skills and at the same time improve their reading comprehension. This in turn will improve the students' reading ability.

The main thrust of the project will be to improve reading comprehension both at the literal and inferential levels. Bearing this in mind it is also expected that the student will require instruction in other skill areas. This fact accepted, the intervention has been designed to improve the student's understanding at the sentence, concept and topic levels. This will be attempted through a "reciprocal teaching approach" (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998).

This project is based on a body of research that investigated the structures, processes and meta-processes in comprehension instruction. Snow Burns & Griffin (1998) reviewed this research that was conducted from the late eighties to the mid-nineties and focused on the notion of "reciprocal teaching". This intervention strategy, based on continuous text, involved the teacher and student dialoguing about the meaning of the text. The student was encouraged to use strategies of predicting, question generating, summarising and clarifying that were modelled by the teacher. These strategies are designed to enhance the student's ability to construct meaning from the text. The "reciprocal teaching" approach was originally designed as an intervention for students who were experiencing language related difficulties. It was mainly used with students who were from high poverty areas of America and with those students who were identified as having language or learning disabilities. Snow Burns and Griffin (1998) found that the results of these studies showed that student's comprehension skills especially their recall of information, their ability to draw inferences and their problem solving skills improved. At the same time teacher expectations were raised in regard to what these students could actually do and there were fewer referrals to special education or remedial programs.

From other research into emergent readers it has become apparent that students who have had story books read to them at an early age develop an understanding of how stories develop, the way texts are composed and have an understanding of book language and the mechanics of a story. (Senechal, Le Fevre, Thomas and Daley 1996 Ollila & Mayfield 1992.) These enhance the student's literary development once they are taught the various reading skills. Yaden Rowe & MacGillivray (1996). in their

review of emergent literacy research note like Sulzby and Teal (1991) that storybook reading is one of the major factors in emergent literacy development and while there is disagreement as to the effective size of the literacy gain, the findings all point to improvement.

This is particularly true for ESL students where studies have shown that non-English speaking students who have had interactive story reading "improve their scores on language, print concepts and writing measures over their peers" (Yaden Rowe & MacGillibray1996 p2). Also studies on "interactive reading" of storybooks to ESL learners have shown development in listening comprehension, storytelling, decoding and language use. Furthermore Yaden Rowe & MacGillibray (1996) also found that the research showed students from low-income backgrounds also benefit from this program. If students are to develop the necessary language and meta-cognitive skills they need to understand printed text they need a knowledge and experience of the English language.

Snow and Tabors (1996 p142) describe storybook reading as one of the four mechanisms of inter-generational transfer of literacy. Leu (1997) states that ESL students need direct and specific teaching in language and higher meta-cognitive skills in order to be successful in reading. It has been found that low ability groups in which ESL students are often placed do not focus on higher order meta-cognitive skills or meaning related activities but rather on the mechanics of reading. Consequently low ability group students do not develop the self-monitoring skills necessary for independent reading. Leu (1997) also indicated that research has shown that unknown vocabulary is a major obstacle for ESL readers.

With this in mind, it would appear that the problem is, how to improve reading comprehension and at the same time work on developing the ESL student's vocabulary and oral language skills. The student needs to learn the self-monitoring meta-cognitive skills esential to gain meaning and at the same time the ability to understand what is being communicated through the text. This problem may be present for English speaking students but is compounded when English is the second language.

The major aim of this project then is to establish whether the student's language ability can be improved and at the same time self-monitoring skills can be developed so that the student's understanding of what has been read will improve. This will be the focus of this action research project.

METHOD

Design
The study used a two-prong approach – the first was the reading of a picture storybook by the teacher to the student. A reciprocal teaching model was used which provided guided practise in the use of four strategies – predicting, question generating, summarising and clarifying. Second the student read his own text. The student predicted, generated questions, summarised and clarified what he had read. After each session a record was kept of the number of concepts the student understood from the picture story reading and from the text he read himself.

Setting
The school is a large metropolitan primary school situated in the south-eastern suburbs. It is in a low socio economic area with over 60% of the families receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance. There are over 600 students with the majority (over 95%) coming from a non-English speaking background. Approximately 10% of the student population qualify for integration funding. While this all poses problems for the delivery of programs it should be noted that all classroom teachers have had professional development in working with ESL students (a 10 week course "ESL in the Mainstream"). There is also a comprehensive special education team working with both students and classroom teachers. While there is a high proportion of ESL families it is also significant that these families value education and see it as very important.

Participant
The participant was chosen from Year 3. He has a history of reading difficulty and has had significant reading intervention in the past but shown minimal gain. He has English as a second language and finds reading difficult. He is a talkative and outgoing child but has limited experience of the English language and his speech is often short and telegraphic. He is currently independently reading texts equivalent of an early Year 1 level.

Materials
A series of picture books was selected from the library that it was thought would be of interest to the student. The illustrations carried the storyline (see appendix list). A series of level appropriate texts, was also selected that the student could read (see appendix list).

All books were analysed for comprehension concepts and the student responses were scored against the number of concepts identified (see appendix).

Cue cards were made to help recall – who, where, what happened, why did it happen, how did it finish.

Student's predictions before reading were recorded on a sheet and then checked after reading was completed. This was done for both the picture story book reading and the student read text.

Procedure

The student was withdrawn and taken on an individual basis for eight sessions. These sessions were approximately 30 minutes and took place every day.

Before the intervention strategy was introduced the student had a picture storybook read to him and he read a text without any pre-reading discussion. This provided a baseline for the student's comprehension level. This will indicate whether or not the intervention strategy has any impact on the student's ability to summarise and comprehend the texts at the end of the project.

In the following seven sessions, before the teacher read a picture book the student was asked to predict what the story was about, what would happen, the characters and the setting. This information was gleaned from looking at the pictures and discussion with the teacher. These responses were recorded under the various headings "who, where, what,

why" format.

The teacher then read the book and asked the student to summarise the story. In the discussion that followed the teacher ticked the student's correct predictions.
If clarification was needed the student checked back to the text. The student's summary was recorded and tallied against the concept analysis of the text.

Next the student read his own text. As part of the orientation process he read the title, looked at the illustrations and predicted what would happen using the "who, what, where, why" format. The teacher recorded the student's responses. After reading the text the student summarised the story. This was recorded and checked against the concept analysis of the text.

The data collected from both the picture book reading and the student's own reading was tabulated and examined. It was expected that the student would be able to transfer the use of the skills from the reading of the picture story to his own reading. It is expected that there will be improvement in both the student's prediction and summarising skills.

Results

The student's performance is described in two sections
1)   the prediction and summary of the picture story book read by the teacher
2)   the prediction and summary of the text read by the student

The prediction score was calculated by scoring the student's predictions of what would happen in the story against the comprehension concepts contained in the text. The student's predictions were recorded after the student had examined the title and pictures of the text. Incorrect predictions were not scored. These scores were then converted into percentages. Similarly the summary score was calculated by scoring the student's summary against the comprehension concepts contained in the text. Any incorrect or superfluous information was not scored. These scores were then converted into percentages. This same approach was used for both the teacher read picture books and the student read text.

The first session involved no previewing of the text and consequently there were no prediction results. This was to gain a indication of the student's level of comprehension for both texts that are read to the student and texts the student read himself.

In the sessions 2 – 8 the same procedure was adopted. The student viewed the text, noted the characters, setting and what he thought would happen in the story. The stories were then read, first the teacher read the picture book and then the student read his own level text. After the reading had finished the student was asked to retell the story and this was taped.

All sessions were carried out in a quiet room with no distractions. The student was always keen to attend and seemed to enjoy each session. He often yawned during the sessions most notably when he perceived the tasks to be difficult.

Picture Book Prediction & Summary

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
100								
90								
80								
70								
60								
50								
40								
30								
20								
10								
0								

Sessions

Prediction
Summary

Picture Book

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Prediction	—	$7/12$	$5/11$	$10/17$	$2/10$	$5/10$	$3/10$	$3/11$
%	—	58	45	58	20	50	30	27
Summary	$3.5/14$	$8/12$	$9/11$	$12/17$	$8/10$	$10/10$	$7/10$	$3/11$
%	25	66	81	70	80	100	70	27
Difference	—	8	36	12	60	50	40	0

This data displays an improvement in the student's ability to recall what is read to him. There is a dramatic improvement over the first six sessions however the final two sessions showed a marked decline. This could possibly be due to a lack of interest or knowledge in the subject matter or the fact the student had not taken his medication. This was particularly noticeable in the final session. However the other instances still show a significant difference between the student's prediction and summary rate, ranging from 8 – 60% for the picture book.

Student Read Text Predictions & Summary

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
100								
90								
80								
70								
60								
50								
40								
30								
20								
10								
0								

Sessions

Prediction

Student Read Text

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Prediction	—	$2/4$	$3/6$	$5/7$	$3/7$	$3/10$	$2/7$	$4/5$
%	—	50	50	71	42	30	29	80
Summary	$2/4$	$2/4$	$5/6$	$7/7$	$7/7$	$7/10$	$7/7$	$4/5$
%	50	50	83	100	100	70	100	80
Difference	—	08	33	29	58	40	71	0

The same can be said for the student read text. By predicting what was thought to happen the student enhanced his comprehension score. Once again there was a significant difference between the prediction score and the summary ranging from 0 – 71%.

Overall this data suggests that this intervention strategy has made an improvement to the student's comprehension and ability to make meaning from what he has read. If you compare the results of sessions 2 – 8 with the original attempt in session 1 this improvement is clearly obvious. Consequently prediction and text orientation have a significant effect on the student's comprehension level.

Discussion

The findings of this project support the initial hypothesis that reading picture story books improves the student's understanding of literacy concepts, language skills and comprehension. Over the series of eight sessions it became clear that the "reciprocal teaching method" had benefits and there was a transfer of skills from the texts being read to the student to the student reading himself. This would support the research into emergent readers by Senechal Le Fevre Thomas and Daley (1996) and Yaden Rowe and MacGillivray (1996) that reading books to young children enhances their literacy development once reading skills are taught.

Furthermore the data supports the ideas of Leu (1997) that ESL students benefit from specific and direct teaching of language skills. For once the student was given the structure of "who, where, what, why" he was able to construct meaning more easily. Also it was noted that as the sessions progressed the student made a significant shift from simply trying to recall every detail, word for word, to attempting to generalise and summarise a series of actions in one idea or concept sentence. He also started relating the text to his life experience and discussing what was real and imaginary, fact and fantasy.

The most significant impact this project has had has been the effect on the student's attitude towards reading. He asked to take books home, wanted to read to his teacher and was interested in finding books from the library that he could actually read himself. All these were uncharacteristic of this student's behaviour prior to this project. Other changes in reading behaviour were also observed. In the early sessions if the student came across a word he did not know he would stop and ask the teacher to provide the word. In later sessions the student attempted to break up words into component parts and demonstrated the skill of "reading on" to self correct. The student displayed some evidence that he was making connections between grapho phonic patterns (eg. yelled is similar to yellow). The research studies noted similar changes to the student's attitude when using this reciprocal approach.

Finally it became apparent that the student had a rich series of past experiences that could be brought to the reading task. This in turn increased the class teacher's expectation of the student's output and developed his own positive self concept as a reader.

This project raises a number of questions and implications for the teaching of reading to ESL learners. How can we ensure that ESL students, beginning school, have a rich background and experience of picture story books? Is this an integral and vital part of the early literacy program of ESL learners? How can we ensure that the meta cognitive skills are not over looked by zealous teachers who are keen to teach the mechanics of the reading process particularly to low achieving or ESL students and neglect the meta cognitive area? This project could further expand to investigate these questions and how this design could impact on other areas such as the grapho phonic, syntactic semantics and attitudinal outlook of ESL and low achieving students.

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Appendix

	Picture Books	Student Text
Session 1	Sea In My Bedroom *Margaret Wild*	Kites *Bettina Ling*
Session 2	Mr Grumpy's Motor Car *John Burningham*	A Tree Fell Over the River *P & S Sloan*
Session 3	Jim and the Beanstalk *Raymond Briggs*	The Scarecrow *P & S Sloan*
Session 4	Gorilla *Anthony Browne*	Naughty Patch *Helen Depree*
Session 5	Amanda Dinosaur *Wendy Orr*	Tadpoles & Frogs *Jenny Feely*
Session 6	The Shipping Basket *John Burningham*	Mother's Day *Beverley Randell*
Session 7	The Worst Monster in the World *Pat Hutchins*	Jimmy *Sandra Iversen*
Session 8	Car Wash Monster *Edel Wignell*	A Visit to the Library *Sandra Iversen*

Student Texts

Session 1
Kites - Bettina Ling
ß   different coloured kites fly
ß   kites fly across the sky   1
ß   kites are all colours of the rainbow   1
ß   look at them fly

$^2/_4$ 50%

Session 2
A Tree Fell Over the River – Peter Sloan

Character	-	animals (mouse, chipmunk, skunk, deer, wolf, bear)	
		tree River	$^3/_3$
Setting	-	forest or river	$^1/_1$

Concepts
ß   tree fell over river
ß   animals walk over the tree to cross river   1
ß   (mouse, chipmunk, skunk, deer, wolf)
ß   bear falls into river   1

$^2/_4$ 50%

Session 3
The Scarecrow – Peter Sloan

| *Character* | - | scarecrow, animals, crow | $^3/_3$ |
| *Setting* | - | farm | 1 |

Concepts
ß   farmer made scarecrow   1
ß   all animals scared of scarecrow and go away   1
ß   crow not scared of scarecrow   1
ß   sit on his arms   1
ß   cat comes   1
ß   cat scares crow away

$^5/_6$ 83%

Session 4
Naughty Patch – Helen Depree

| *Character* | - | Dad, Grandma, Patch | $^3/_3$ |
| *Setting* | - | back garden | 1 |

Concepts
ß   grandmother is asleep in garden   1
ß   Patch comes into yard   1
ß   digs for his bone   1
ß   Dad comes out   1
ß   yells at Patch   1
ß   Grandma wakes up   1
ß   says naughty Patch   1

$^7/_7$ 100%

Session 5
Tadpoles and Frogs – Jenny Feely

Character	-	Tadpole & frog		$^2/_2$

Setting	-	pond	1

Concepts

ß	frog lays eggs	1	
ß	eggs hatch into tadpole		1
ß	tadpole eats and grows	1	
ß	grows back legs		1
ß	grows front legs		1
ß	tail shrinks	1	
ß	tadpole is a frog		1
		$^7/_7$	100%

Session 6
Mothers Day — Beverley Randell

Character	-	Mum, Dad, Matthew, Emma		$^4/_4$

Setting	-	home	1

Concepts

ß	Emma makes card for Mum	1	
ß	Matthew forgot to make card		
ß	starts making card		
ß	Emma & Dad make breakfast in bed for Mum		1
ß	they take breakfast upstairs	1	
ß	Matthew asked to come		
ß	wake Mum up and give her breakfast	1	
ß	Emma gives card	1	
ß	Matthew gives card	1	
ß	Mum says thank you and likes Mother's Day	1	
		$^7/_{10}$	70%

Session 7 – Sandra Ivensen
Jimmy

Character	-	Jimmy, Mum, Dad		$^3/_3$

Setting	-	home	1

Concepts

ß	Jimmy can do many things eg run, jump, play soccer	1
ß	Jimmy can read, paint and write	1
ß	Jimmy cannot hear people (Mum, Dad)	1
ß	Jimmy cannot hear things (cat, dog, car)	1
ß	Jimmy reads lips and uses sign language with Mum & Dad	1

ß Jimmy talks with his lips and hands	1	
ß he likes talking	1	
	$^7/_7$	100%

Session 8
A Visit to the Library – Sandra Iversen

Character	-	class of children, librarian	$^2/_2$
Setting	-	library	1

Concepts

ß children go to the library to choose books	1	
ß various children choose different books that interest them		
ß children take book to librarian	1	
ß librarian stamps books	1	
ß librarian choose one of children's books to read		1
	$^4/_5$	80%

Picture Books

Session 1
There's a Sea in My Bedroom – Margaret Wild

Character	-	David, Mum, Dad, shell	$^4/_4$

Setting	-	beach & bedroom	$^0/_2$

Concepts

ß	David hates the sea	1
ß	likes collecting shells	1
ß	find special shell and can hear sea inside	$^1/_2$
ß	when he heard sea in shell wasn't scared any more	
ß	felt sorry for sea in shell	
ß	wanted to let it out	
ß	stroked shell and asked it to come out	
ß	sea filled his bedroom and he played	
ß	Mum and Dad wanted to know what was happening	
ß	David told them there's a sea in my bedroom	
ß	parents come into bedroom	
ß	the sea was gone but a pile of sand was left	
ß	Dad asked if David wanted to go to beach	
ß	David said he wasn't frightened any more	1

$^{3.5}/_{14}$ 25%

Session 2
Mr Gumpy's Motor Car – John Burningham

Character	-	Mr Gumpy, car, boy, girl, farm animals	$^4/_5$
		80%	

Setting	-	across the fields / farm

Concepts

ß	Mr Gumpy going for a drive	1	
ß	children and animals ask to come	1	
ß	they all go in the car, it's squashy	1	
ß	they go across the fields		
ß	it starts to rain	1	
ß	the road gets muddy		
ß	someone has to push but no-one wants to		1
ß	the car gets stuck in the mud	1	
ß	everyone has to push	1	
ß	the car gets over the hill		
ß	it stops raining		
ß	everyone has a swim	1	

$^8/_{12}$ 66%

Session 3
Jim and the Beanstalk – Raymond Briggs

Character	-	Jim, Giant and mother, people in town	$^3/_4$

Setting	-	Giants house, town	$^2/_2$

Concepts

ß	Jim climbs beanstalk	1	
ß	Jim went in the giant's castle	1	
ß	Giant can't see	1	
ß	Jim gets glasses		1
ß	Giant couldn't eat because he had no teeth	1	
ß	Jim gets false teeth	1	
ß	Giant has no hair	1	
ß	Jim gets wig	1	
ß	Giant likes to eat boys		
ß	Jim runs away, cuts down beanstalk	1	
ß	Giant gives letter and gold coin		

$^9/_{11}$ 81%

Session 4
Gorilla – Anthony Browne

Character	-	Gorilla, Hannah, Dad	$^3/_3$

Setting	-	home, zoo	$^2/_2$

Concepts

ß	Hannah loved Gorillas	1	
ß	Hannah wants to see a real gorilla	1	
ß	Hannah wanted her Dad to take her to zoo		
ß	Dad didn't have time, always working		1
ß	they never did anything together		
ß	night of her birthday asked for a gorilla		1
ß	she found small parcel – a gorilla on her bed		
ß	threw gorilla into corner		1
ß	gorilla became real	1	
ß	gorilla takes her to the zoo	1	
ß	goes to zoo to see gorillas and monkeys		1
ß	goes to the pictures		
ß	has something to eat	1	
ß	has a dance	1	
ß	in morning toy gorilla again		
ß	Dad takes her to the zoo		1
ß	Hannah was happy	1	

$^{12}/_{17}$ 70%

Session 5
Amanda's Dinosaur – Wendy Orr

Character	-	Amanda, Mum, dinosaur, animals, fox	
Setting	-	farm	$^4/_5$

Concepts

Concept		
ß Amanda lived on a farm		1
ß Amanda wanted a dinosaur	1	
ß animal babies born		
ß Amanda finds an egg in a log		
ß egg hatches, dinosaur comes out		1
ß Amanda feeds dinosaur		1
ß Amanda's dinosaur grew fast	1	
ß fox tries to get chickens and rabbits	1	
ß Amanda and dinosaur chase fox away		1
ß the garden was destroyed	1	
	$^8{}_{10}$	80%

Session 6
The Shopping Basket – John Burningham

Character	-	Mum, Steven, animals	$^3/_3$
Setting	-	neighbourhood, shop	$^1/_1$

Concepts

Concept		
ß Mum asks Steven to go to the shop	1	
ß walks to shop past lots of things		1
ß buys the groceries	1	
ß bear wants the eggs	1	
ß monkey wants the bananas	1	
ß kangaroo wants apples	1	
ß goat wants oranges	1	
ß pig wants doughnuts	1	
ß elephant wants crisps	1	
ß Mum wants to know what took so long		1
	$^{10}/_{10}$	100%

Session 7
Worst Monster in World – Pat Hutchins

Character	-	Hazel, Billy, Mum, Dad, Grandpa & Grandma	$^6/_6$
Setting	-	home	1

Concepts

ß new baby comes home
ß sister's jealous
ß grandparents visit praise baby
ß Dad didn't have time, always

ß	ignored Hazel	1	
ß	baby can do many things, so can Hazel		1
ß	baby entered into worst baby competition	1	
ß	baby wins	1	
ß	Hazel tries to get rid of baby	1	
ß	Hazel gives baby away		1

$^7/_{10}$ 70%

Session 8
Car Wash Monster – Edel Wignell

Character   -   Dad, children & dog, car wash, Mum $^4/_5$

Setting   -   car wash   1
Concepts

ß	Dad calls into carwash on way home		
ß	Anna imagines it's a monster that's going to eat them		1
ß	Ben and Mum go to carwash		
ß	Ben thinks a monster is going to eat him up		
ß	family goes to farm		
ß	go to carwash on way home	1	
ß	dog jumped out of car window into carwash		
ß	children chased dog into carwash		
ß	children loved the carwash, it tickled	1	
ß	Mum & Dad & operator tell children to come out		
ß	children liked carwash	1	

$^3/_{11}$ 27%