Hypothesis: Explicit teaching of synonyms and paraphrasing will improve students reading comprehension in grade three students.

Procedure

Eight Students with mixed ability were chosen to see the effects that the paraphrasing strategy using the acronym RAP has on improving reading comprehension of text. There was then a second component of explicit instruction in the use of synonyms to aid students with putting ideas into their own words. The eight students were withdrawn from the classroom during the writing block for one hour. The students had four lessons in a week and ten lessons were taught with another two sessions for pre and post testing. Students in the classroom continued to participate in the regular classroom program with instruction that paraphrasing and synonyms were not to be taught.

The first and last session were dedicated to pre and post testing. The Torch test for the pre testing was administered by the classroom teacher three weeks before I began teaching the lessons so I used the results and did not administer another test for Torch. I did however administer the Synonym test (Munro 2005) individually in the pre test as at this stage I was unaware that there was a group test to administer. The marking of the synonym test was as prescribed by Munro (2005). During final session for the post testing I administered both Torch and Synonym test to the students. The control group remained with the classroom teacher and she administered the test and I administered it to the control group. This was to maximise time.

The ten sessions were broken up into two sections. During first half hour the focus was to develop their use of synonyms. The second half of the session was focused on paraphrasing using the RAP acronym. Refer to Appendix 1 for full details of the lesson plan. The duration of each session was an hour with the last five minutes the students shared what they had learnt in the session that day with the whole group.

The first two sessions were to introduce the students to synonyms. They were introduced to the term and a series of different activities were provided to the students so that they could become immersed in the concepts. I also introduced the students to a thesaurus and we spent time using the thesaurus as a group. I felt that the students needed to have a firm grasp of how to use a thesaurus. I did not introduce the RAP acronym in these sessions as I wanted to see how the students performed with paraphrasing text. I had no benchmark of what they could do as I am not the classroom teacher. Some students found paraphrasing the text extremely difficult and many were unable to remember parts of the text. I found that this gave me an insight into what the students were capable of.
In the remaining sessions the students used the acronym RAP and I explicitly taught the students step by step how to paraphrase using fiction text and non-fiction text. During each session the students reflected on the reading material from the session before. At the start of each session we revised what a synonym is and we also revised the acronym RAP and used the text from the session before to revise the step before introducing a new text for the day.

The next five sessions I used fiction text, from the collection of Aesop’s Fables and in the remaining sessions I used non-fiction text from the Rigby Collection. The focus for the nonfiction text was reptiles as the students were very interested in this topic. In each session the teacher first models the reading of the text whilst the students follow reading the text silently. Then we reread the text for a second time as a whole group. A general discussion was had and then students worked individually to find the synonyms from the text that was underlined. Once they had found all the synonyms they then rewrote the text with the new synonyms. Then in pairs the students read the text to each other discussing if the correct synonyms were picked. A few students would then read the text with the new synonyms out to the whole group and we had a quick discussion about words used. The final stage was that the students would hand up the text they had written and they would then paraphrase the text using their new words. The focus of this was to see how much of the text they could remember and if the new synonyms learnt for the day were being used.

The students made steady progress each session and I began to see dramatic improvement with the speed at which the students would complete the set task and how they were becoming more independent as each session passed. At the end of the sessions when students had share time they would say that they felt confident to use the RAP strategy at home and in the classroom. They felt that it really helped them remember the text. This was affirming to hear the students reflecting their thoughts with the group as a whole and to get positive feedback about using the strategy.
Action Research- Synonyms and Paraphrasing Text

Lesson Plan: Session One

Whole Group Activity:

Focus: What is a synonym?

Introduction to what a synonym is read the definition together.

Look at the word BIG on the definition sheet and write some synonyms for that.

Students use a thesaurus to help them learn new words some examples are:

(large, huge, gigantic, big, vast, enormous, whopping, considerable, massive)

Write the words on the laminated sheet.

Practise using the thesaurus with other words this is done with the whole group:

Common- ordinary, general, regular, familiar, normal, frequent, universal.

Write the words as a whole group, these words are also written on the laminated sheet so we can revise them on the next session.

Group Activity:

Explain the five synonym activity rotation to the students. The focus for this will be to immerse the students with synonyms and give them the opportunity to use a thesaurus. My role is to roam between groups and to explicitly teach the students how to use a thesaurus and to observe if they have understood what a synonym is. Each activity will then be used at a later session and will be taught explicitly.

The students will do 5 activities with synonyms each activity will last for 5 minutes with a total time of 25 minutes.

Activity 1: Memory Game: flashcards with synonyms and the students need to match them the one with the most matches win.

Activity 2: Match the words with its synonym- draw lines to match words.

Activity 3: Connect the synonyms: Draw lines to match the synonyms.

Activity 4: Circle the synonym: pick the correct synonym for the word.
Activity 5: Memory Game: flashcards with synonyms and the students need to match the words, the student with the most matches win.

Whole Group Activity:

Text Used: “The Leopard and the Fox.”

Teacher has an A3 sheet with a short text and students have an A4 sheet with the same text. The text will have highlighted words that students need to find synonyms for.

- Teacher reads the text while the students follow.
- Teacher and students read the text together.
- Read together the highlighted words.
- Students find synonyms for the words in the text.
- Read to see if it makes sense.
- Swap with another student to and read the words they added in.
- Pick a student to read the text with the new synonyms.

The Final Stage:

The students will write a recount of the text in their own words hopefully using the new synonyms they have learnt.

Pick a student to read out their recount to the class.

Concluding game: Hangman- Pick a card from the memory game and show the students the word and its match then I will pick another synonym and they will need to guess it.
Lesson Plan: Session Two

Whole Group Activity:

Introduction: ask the students to tell me what a synonym is. As a group read the definition together.

Revise the word BIG that we looked up yesterday ask each student to tell me a synonym for the word.

(large, huge, gigantic, big, vast, enormous, whopping, considerable, massive)

Practice using the thesaurus as a group by looking up another word. Write the words on the laminated sheet.

Command- control, authority, rule, dominate, power, sway, lead, direct, be in charge.

Group Activity:

The students will do 5 activities with synonyms each activity will last for 5 minutes with a total time of 25 minutes. This will be last time the students will do these activities as a rotation.

Activity 1: Memory Game: flashcards with synonyms and the students need to match them the one with the most matches win.

Activity 2: Match the words with its synonym- draw lines to match words.

Activity 3: Connect the synonyms: Draw lines to match the synonyms. Second activity uses the thesaurus to find the synonyms.

Activity 4: Circle the synonym: pick the correct synonym for the word.

Activity 5: Memory Game: flashcards with synonyms and the students need to match them the one with the most matches win.

Whole Group Activity:

Text Used: “The Leopard and the Fox.”

Teacher has an A3 sheet with a short text and students have an A4 sheet with the same text. The text will have highlighted words that students need to find synonyms for.

- Teacher reads the text while the students follow.
- Teacher and students read the text together.
- Read together the highlighted words.
- Students find synonyms for the words in the text.
- Read to see if it makes sense.
• Swap with another student to and read the words they added in.
• Pick a student to read the text with the new synonyms.

The Final Stage:
The students will write a recount of the text in their own words hopefully using the new synonyms they have learnt.

Pick a student to read out their recount to the class.

Concluding game: Hangman- Pick a card from the memory game and show the students the word and its match then I will pick another synonym and they will need to guess it.

Lesson Plan: Session Three

Whole Group Activity:

Introduction: the focus of this session is to introduce the students to the strategy of paraphrasing.

Things you can do that will help you to remember what you read.

1. Make a picture in your mind.
2. Another thing is called paraphrasing.

This is what you can do - tell yourself what you have read. After you have read the sentence, you say it to yourself, in your own way. You try to change as many words as you can.

Let's practice it as whole group:
Use the text from yesterday “The Leopard and the Fox” and get the children to paraphrase the text sentence by sentence. This will be done as a whole group.

The teacher will pick various students to paraphrase the sentence from the text to monitor if they have understood how to paraphrase.

**Introduce the new text for today and as a group we will paraphrase together.**

**New Text:**“The Ant and the Grasshopper”

Once we have done the paraphrasing together and I am happy that they have grasped the concept, they can then go to their tables and find new synonyms in the text. Then they will rewrite it and retell the story in their own word to the partner they are working with.

Pick two students to read the text with new synonyms and them get them to paraphrase the whole text in their own words.

I will collect the text and the students will rewrite the text using new synonyms.

Pick a student to read out their recount.

**Whole Group Activity:** Memory Game on the floor and mix both GROUP 1 & GROUP 5 cards together. Talk about the meanings of words as we go.
Lesson Plan: Session Four

Whole Group Activity:

Revise the strategy of paraphrasing and also what is a synonym.

Synonyms:

Students look up a synonym.

Then reread it for a second time and paraphrase the text sentence for sentence. The teacher picks different students to paraphrase the sentences. At the end pick two students to paraphrase the text.

The students then go back to their tables and find synonyms for the words in the text.

Then they read the text to a partner to see if it makes sense.

Final Stage is that they then write the story in their own words hopefully using the new synonyms.

Pick three students to read the recounts to the whole group.

Lesson Plan: Session Five

Whole Group Activity: Synonyms

Revise the strategy of paraphrasing and also what is a synonym, the children will say in their own words

1. What is a synonym?  2. What do we do when we paraphrase?

Write in point form what is the process of paraphrasing.

Activity One- Synonyms:

As a whole group using the word wheels find synonyms for words in the thesaurus. The students will pick the words to investigate. Talk and discuss the words as we go. Pick three words.

The students then will put one of these words in a sentence.

Activity Two- Synonyms Worksheet:
The students need to circle the synonym for each given word. Students do this individually and then as a class come together and have a discussion about it.

**Whole Group Activity: Paraphrasing**

**FOCUS:** Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.

**Text:** “The Farmer and the Stork” - Aesop’s Fable

As a group read the text together.

Then reread it for a second time and paraphrase the text sentence for sentence. The teacher picks different students to paraphrase the sentences. At the end pick two students to paraphrase the text.

The students then go back to their tables and find synonyms for the words in the text.

Then they read the text to a partner to see if it makes sense.

Final Stage is that they then write the story in their own words hopefully using the new synonyms.

Pick three students to read the recounts to the whole group.

**Lesson Plan: Session Six**

**Whole Group Activity: Synonyms**

**Introduction:** Read and revise a definition of synonym.

**Activity 1:** Students sit in a circle each child gives a word and someone in the group suggest a synonym.

**Activity 2:** In pairs children have two flashcards with words; they need to write 4 synonyms for each word. Come together as a group and write the synonyms on a A3 sheet of paper.

**Whole Group Activity: Paraphrasing**

**FOCUS: Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.**

Revise what paraphrasing means. Introduce what R.A.P means and how we can use it when reading text. **Text:** “The Hare and Tortoise.”

Read the text together and ask if they have heard this story before as it is a well known text. Paraphrase the text at sentence level picking different students to paraphrase the text.
Then reread it for a second time and paraphrase the text sentence for sentence. The teacher picks different students to paraphrase the sentences. At the end pick two students to paraphrase the text.

The students then go back to their tables and find synonyms for the words in the text.

Then they read the text to a partner to see if it makes sense.

Final Stage is that they then write the story in their own words hopefully using the new synonyms.

Pick three students to read the recounts to the whole group.

Lesson Plan: Session Seven

Whole Group Activity: Synonyms

FOCUS:

Introduction: Read and revise a definition of synonym.

Activity 1: The activity from the previous lesson the children had a flashcard with a word and in groups they had to find four synonyms for that word. We placed the synonyms on the whiteboard as shown below.

- huge
- massive
- big
- large
- king size

Today’s lesson I will remove the cards from the middle of the words and they will need to place the flashcard with the correct synonyms.

Activity 2: Worksheet form group work in lesson 1&2 – Draw a line to match the synonyms. Students do this individually. Then as a group, go through the words together having a discussion about each word and if they know any other synonyms for that word.

FOCUS: Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.

Revise what is paraphrasing and revise what R.A.P is and how we use it.

Short passage Amazing Lizards – Rigby Literacy Collection Phase 1: “What Are Lizards?” Page 2-3

Teacher reads the text aloud will the student follow the text.
Student and teacher read the text together and paraphrase every third sentence. At the end of the short paragraph select two students to paraphrase the passage.

Activity: Students now will go and paraphrase the text.

Pick three students to come out and read it to the group.

Lesson Plan: Session Eight

FOCUS: Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.

Revise what is paraphrasing and revise what R.A.P is and how we use it.

Short passage Amazing Lizards – Rigby Literacy Collection Phase 1:

Each page has a description of a type of lizard from page 4 – 21, every student will pick a type of lizard and they will read the text and then paraphrase the text and write it in their own words. Each student will read their recount out to the group.

Lesson Plan: Session Nine

FOCUS: Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.

Revise what is paraphrasing and revise what R.A.P is and how we use it.

Rigby Literacy Collection Phase 1: Middle Primary “Water Dragon” Mind Map and Literary Description. Page 56 – 57

Whole Group Activity:

Water Dragon Mind Map – Using the words from the Mind Map each student makes a sentence with the words and the student writes it on a sentence strip. They then read the sentence they wrote to the group. In pairs they swop the sentence strip and each student needs to paraphrases the sentence the other student has written. The teacher then picks a few students to read it out.

Then as a group read the Literary Description of the Water Dragon.

In pairs student will get a sentence strip with a sentence from the literary description that the teacher has written. The students need to pick two words to find synonyms and then paraphrase that
sentence. Each group will come up and read the sentence that is paraphrased with the new synonyms.

At the end of the session each student will tell the group what they have learnt from today’s session and how paraphrasing has helped them.

Lesson Plan: Session Ten

FOCUS: Paraphrasing at sentence level using factual text.

Revise what is paraphrasing and revise what R.A.P is and how we use it.

Introduction: Circle game – One student says a word and the next person gives a synonym for that word.

Thesaurus Race- one person says a word and there is a race to find a synonym in the thesaurus.

Individual Group Activity:

As a whole group we will read the text - “Water Dragons.” (From Rigby Collection 1) This text was used in lesson 9. Four students will do activity sheet 1 and five students will do activity sheet 2.

The activity sheet has half of the text written on it and they need to read the text, find synonyms for the underlined words and then rewrite the text in their own words.

Each student will read their paraphrased text to a partner and then out to the class. When they read it to their partner the focus will be if it makes sense and if any adjustments need to be made.

Concluding Activity:

Each student will write a reflection on how the ten lessons have helped them in their comprehension of text.
What have we done to understand our reading?

How does it help?

When will you use these strategies?

Have you already used them and when?
R.A.P

Read the sentence

Ask what it means

and

Put it in your own words
WHAT ARE LIZARDS?
WATER DRAGONS

The lizards were water dragons. They were big with wide, flat bodies shaped like great broad leaves. Their tails were thin, like whips and the dragons could move as fast as a whip.

big ________________________________________________
wide ______________________________________________
great ______________________________________________
broad _____________________________________________
thin ______________________________________________
fast ______________________________________________

Rewrite the text using a new synonym.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
If they were frightened, they lifted their heads and opened their mouth very wide. Then they could see their pink tongues, and a long row of small, flat teeth. With the spiky bristles under their chins, they looked fierce, but really they were friendly and a little bit shy.

Rewrite the text using a new synonym.

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