

Teaching Year 4 boys from and ESL background to use synonyms and paraphrase improves their comprehension of non-fiction texts

TEACHING OUTLINES

Materials

Materials used for the pre and post testing were as follows:

- TORCH – Tests Of Reading Comprehension (2005) Grasshoppers text (non-fiction)
- Paraphrasing test (Munro) Children were tested in a group.
- Synonym task (Munro) Children were tested in a group.
- Self-Efficacy questionnaire (adapted by J Munro). Children were tested individually
- I asked students individually, ‘What do good readers do?’ I recorded their responses.

Materials used for the 10 teaching sessions were as follows:

- ‘Help! Help! It’s an emergency’ Opat D, from Endangered or Extinct! The News, Horwitz Education.
- ‘Japan Rocks!’ Whitmore A, from Changing Earth, The News, Horwitz Education.
- ‘Tigers’ Rohr I, from Big Cats, Go facts Mammals, Blake education
- ‘Twister terror!’ Whitmore A, from Changing Earth, The News, Horwitz Education.
- Sentence strips and flashcards.
- Chart with the RAP strategy

The texts used in the teaching sessions were graded using the Flesch-Kincaid readability function and they were ‘Help! Help!’ Year 5.1, ‘Japan Rocks!’ Year 5.2, ‘Tigers’ Year 5.4, and ‘Twister Terror’ Year 5.4. These texts were chosen because they were non-fiction texts about topics I thought the students would have some prior knowledge of and interest in i.e. the world and animals, and because they provided opportunities for creating synonyms and restating in their own words. These students are able to decode texts accurately so I was not concerned that the texts were graded as suitable for Year 5 as the students are in Term 4 of Year 4 and because the teaching sessions were scaffolded to support the students as they learned the strategy. I used the texts in order of their readability.

Procedure

The students were withdrawn from the classroom and tested in the Literacy room. They are all familiar with this room and have worked in small groups in this environment before. The students have all worked with me before in their classroom or in a small teaching group. The tests were conducted in the following order:
TORCH reading comprehension test,
Paraphrasing test,
Synonym task,
Self-efficacy questionnaire and
Teacher/student discussions about what good readers do.

The tests were conducted over 4 sessions. Ten lessons were taught over a 2-week period. Each lesson went for 30-40 minutes and was conducted in the morning between 9:30 and 11am. There were 5 lessons in each of the 1st and 2nd weeks. Post

testing was carried out in the 3rd week. The posttests were given in the same order as the pretests over 3 sessions.

In the first lesson we talked about the strategy we were going to be using and why we were using it. The RAP strategy was introduced and each step was discussed. We played a synonym game where we matched words of a similar meaning and practiced putting sentences into our own words. We discussed the format for the rest of the lessons.

In sessions 2-10 we followed the same procedure.

Before reading 10 minutes

- Restating the procedure for paraphrasing and why we use this strategy.
- Reviewing the previous sessions synonyms and paraphrased sentences. Checking we maintained meaning and changed as many words as possible.
- Matching synonym cards from previous session and matching paraphrased sentences on strips.
- Group reading of the text (original and paraphrased) from the previous session
- Looking at new text and paraphrasing title. Looking at pictures/diagrams and discussing meaning. Asking questions about what the text is about.

During reading 15 minutes

- Teacher to read the text aloud.
- Students to read the text to themselves.
- As a group find synonyms for key vocabulary.
- Students take turns to read a sentence aloud and think of how we can say it in a different way. Students to write new sentences on strips.
- Identify the main idea in the paragraphs.

After reading 5 minutes

- Ask students 'What did we do today while reading?' How does this help us?
- Reflect in journals using sentence starters, 'Today I learnt..... This helps me because.....'

In the first 7 lessons we will work together as a group and teacher will model and jointly construct paraphrased sentences and identify synonyms together. As the lessons progress the level of scaffolding will decrease and by lesson 10 the students will be required to independently identify key vocabulary and find synonyms and paraphrase each sentence into their own words maintaining meaning. (See Appendix 3 for detailed lesson plans)

THE LESSONS

Lessons 1-10

The following 10 lessons aim to develop the use of the paraphrasing strategy and synonyms to improve reading comprehension of non-fiction texts.

Lesson 1

Before reading

Explain to students that we are learning a new strategy called Paraphrasing. This strategy helps us understand what we are reading. Paraphrasing is when we read a text and think about the main idea. Then we look at each sentence and change as many words as we can without changing the meaning. Introduce the RAP mnemonic on a large chart. Go through the 3 steps in the RAP mnemonic:

Read the text.

Ask yourself questions about the main idea and details.

Put each sentence into your own words without changing the meaning.

Practice changing words in a sentence. E.g. The boy was riding his bicycle. Mary shifted to a new town. Together think of new synonyms for the key words in each sentence. Discuss if we have changed the meaning.

During reading

Introduce the new text '**Help! Help! It's an emergency**'.

Look at heading, subheading and photos and make predictions.

Teacher will read through the text as the children follow.

The students will then read the text to themselves.

Students to read each sentence aloud.

Together we will go through the first 2 steps in the RAP chart.

After reading

Ask students 'What did we learn about today? How does this help us?'

Reflect in journals using sentence starters, 'Today I learnt..... This helps me because.....'

Lesson 2

Before reading

Revise the strategy. Discuss how this strategy can help us. Go through the RAP chart together.

Retell as a group what the text '**Help! Help! It's an emergency**' is about. What are the main ideas and details?

Give students cards with some of the key words from the text and ask them to match these words with their **synonyms**- *share/split/divide, environment/natural world, plants/flora/vegetation, animals/fauna, habitat/home/surroundings/territory, large/big/huge, drained/dried up, houses/homes/dwellings, dammed/blocked/walled, electricity/power/energy, decreasing/lessening, destroy/ruin, turned/changed, survive/live on/stay alive/last, pollute/contaminate, shelter/housing, depend/rely, society/people, rubbish/waste, oceans/seas, lakes/ponds, cleared/demolished, destroyed/wiped out/devastated.*

During reading

Students to reread the text themselves.

Students to read each sentence aloud.

Teacher to model writing new sentences on the Interactive White Board (IWB).
Check to see if we have maintained meaning.
Students to write the new sentences on strips.

After reading

Ask students ‘What did we learn about today? How does this help us?’
Reflect in journals using sentence starters, ‘Today I learnt..... This helps me because.....’

Lesson 3

Before reading

Go over the strategy and discuss why we use it. Students match strips of the original text with strips of the paraphrased text for ‘Help! Help! It’s an emergency’. Ask ‘Did we maintain meaning?’

Students match key vocabulary with their synonyms. Discuss other words we could use that have a similar meaning. Write these words on cards.

During reading

Students read the text silently.

Students to read each sentence aloud.

Teacher to model writing the sentences in another way maintaining meaning.

Encourage students to contribute their ideas. Check if we have maintained meaning and if the grammatical structures are accurate. Finish paraphrasing, ‘**Help! Help! It’s an emergency**’ Read the original and paraphrased text together.

After reading

Ask students ‘What did we learn about today? How does this help us?’
Reflect in journals using sentence starters, ‘Today I learnt..... This helps me because.....’ Ask students to also reflect on what good readers do.

Lesson 4

Before reading

Revise strategy and the RAP mnemonic. Discuss if the mnemonic is helpful.

Why/Why not? Introduce new text, ‘**Japan rocks!**’ Look at the title only. Make predictions about the text. Show students the picture from the text and ask them to review their predictions. Give students some vocabulary from the text and ask them to think of **synonyms**- *underneath/below, directly/exactly, twitch/jerk, tremble/shake, strikes/hits/attacks, destroyed/demolished/damaged, results/outcomes/consequences, Earth/world/planet, visit/go to/stay, move/shift/stir, plates/segments/slabs, crust/outer layer/shell, rub/scrape, devastating/shocking, place/spot/site/location, major/key/great, experts/authorities*

Write the vocabulary and synonyms on IWB.

During reading

Teacher to read the text to the students.

Students to read the text silently.

Discuss main ideas and details in each paragraph.

Students to read each sentence aloud. Teacher and students to jointly construct new sentences as a group.

After reading

Ask students ‘What did we learn about today? How does this help us?’
Reflect in journals using sentence starters, ‘Today I learnt..... This helps me because.....’ Ask students, ‘Do you have any new ideas about what good readers do?’

Lesson 5

Before reading

Revise the strategy. Discuss how this strategy can help us. Go through the RAP chart together.

Retell as a group what the text ‘Japan rocks!’ is about. What are the main ideas and details? Ask students to drag and match key words and synonyms from Lesson 4.

Look at new sentences from lesson 4. Reread each original and paraphrased sentences and check that meaning has been maintained.

During reading

Students read the text silently.

Read each sentence aloud. Continue to jointly construct sentences together as a group.

Each student takes turns to scribe sentences on the IWB. The group supports each other with synonyms, spelling and grammar.

Read the original and paraphrased text sentence by sentence and check if meaning has been maintained.

After reading

Students to reflect in their journals, using the sentence starters if they wish. Students may wish to draw a cartoon or pictures to demonstrate what they have learnt. Ask if any students would like to share their entries.

Lesson 6

Before reading

Go over the strategy and discuss why we use it. Students match strips of the original text ‘Japan rocks!’ with strips of the paraphrased text. Ask ‘Did we maintain meaning?’

Students match key vocabulary with their synonyms. Discuss other words we could use that have a similar meaning. Write these words on cards.

Introduce new text, ‘**Tigers**’. Look at title and pictures and have students ask questions about the text i.e. Where do tigers live? What do tigers eat? How fast can tigers run? Discuss what type of text they think it is and why.

Match vocabulary and **synonyms** -*largest/biggest, live/reside, marsh/swamp, prey/hunt, hunt/chase, large/big/strong, strong/powerful, agile/nimble, stalk/follow, swift/quick, slowly/gradually, pounce/leap, mainly/mostly, night/dark, solitary/lonely, cub/young tiger, leave/go away, territory/land/area, share/divide/split, species/types/kinds/sorts.*

During reading

Teacher reads text ‘Tigers’ to students. Discuss main ideas and details of text.

Students read text silently.

Students read each sentence in the first paragraph aloud and jointly construct new sentences changing as many words as possible while maintaining meaning.

Check to see if meaning was maintained and new structures are grammatically correct.

After reading

Ask students to reflect on what they learnt today. Students may demonstrate their learning in any way in their journal. Ask students what questions they are asking themselves about using this strategy in future. e.g. How could I use this strategy when I am in secondary school? Could I use this strategy with other texts?

Lesson 7

Before reading

Retell the main ideas in the text '**Tigers**'. Discuss how pictures, titles, subtitles help us understand texts. Students match synonyms on cards from Lesson 6. Review original and paraphrased sentences from the text from Lesson 6. Did we retain meaning?

During reading

Students read the text silently.

Read each sentence aloud in the next paragraph. Continue to jointly construct 2 sentences together as a group. Each student takes turns to scribe sentences on the IWB. The group supports each other with synonyms, spelling and grammar. Students independently paraphrase 2 sentences and share.

Read the original and paraphrased text sentence by sentence and check if meaning has been retained.

After reading

Revise what we did today and why we use this strategy. Ask students, 'What do we do when we paraphrase?' Students reflect in their journals and share with a partner.

Lesson 8 - 10

The students now practice using the strategy with new text '**Twister terror!**'. We will review the strategy using the RAP chart. Identify vocabulary and **synonyms** e.g. *boiling/scorching/roasting/sweltering, charge/attack/stampede, described/explained, huge/massive/enormous, ripped/tore/sped/rushed, hid/took cover, luckily/fortunately/happily, racing/speeding, ahead/in front of, pulled up/stopped/parked, closer/nearer, hit/strike, screamed/shouted/yelled, jumped/leapt/hopped, outrun/escape/get away from, lifted/raised, torn/ripped, died/passed away, disaster/catastrophe*. Write these on cards and play a matching game. Discuss new text title, pictures and ask questions about the main ideas and details.

- Teacher will read the text aloud, and then students will read the text silently.
- Students will read each sentence and put the main ideas and details into their own words.
- Students will read each sentence to check if they have retained meaning.
- Students will reflect in their journals.