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Strategies Teachers can use to Help Support Comprehension in Struggling Readers

Abstract

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Strategies Teachers can use to Help Support Comprehension in Struggling Readers

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Abstract

This study was completed to provide the benefits of using comprehension strategies for struggling readers. The strategy that was mainly focused on in this study was using predicting to help enhance the reader's comprehension. The research was conducted by working with a student one-on-one, using questionnaires, direct instruction, modeling expected behaviors, and allowing the student to complete tasks independently. The findings suggest that using strategies, such as predicting, help students not only gain a better understanding of what they are reading, but help build confidence in their abilities to read.

Strategies Teachers can use to Help Support Comprehension in Struggling Readers

“What did I just read?” is a question that is asked by many young readers. Reading comprehension is one of the biggest struggles that children face while reading. If a child does not understand what they have just read, then they will eventually lose their passion towards reading, building a sense of frustration. As a classroom teacher, it is my job to provide the necessary components and strategies that are helpful in making students become more confident in their ability to become a lifetime reader.

Comprehension is one of the most essential pieces in students having success in reading. It is crucial for students to learn the tools that will help foster comprehension while reading. Developing strategies and techniques to encourage reading comprehension is an imperative job for the classroom teacher. In order to help improve a child’s reading comprehension it is important for the classroom teacher to truly understand the student’s ability to read. There are multiple ways to help a youngster improve their comprehension skills, but as the teacher, you need to find what strategy is the best fit for each individual child. Each Student learns at a different rate and through different modes, making it critical for the teacher to have diverse approaches in teaching comprehension.

Educators use many different styles in teaching reading comprehension. Is there a strategy that works the best? Through the course of this paper I hope to investigate what types of reading comprehension strategies are available and determine if there are multiple strategies that are more helpful and meaningful when teaching struggling readers. In order to complete this task, I will implement different strategies with a struggling reader to see how he responds to the different strategies presented. While working with one student in particular for this study I was able to gain insight on how making reasonable predictions can not only help the student understand what he is reading, but also help build confidence in their reading abilities. By using post-its and making predictions he was able to see the purpose in reading and it seemed to encourage him to finish the task at hand.

It is critical that students learn and build upon their comprehension skills at the elementary level. If not, once they reach the higher grade levels they will lose interest in reading and get discouraged. Teaching students this skill at a young age, will help provide them with the building blocks that they will need to be a successful reader.

Theoretical Framework

Children are constantly exposed to literature in multiple means within our society today. According to Gee (2001) literacy is one's ability to master their secondary discourse while constantly expanding on it. For one to be categorized as mastering their discourse, the individual must be able to participate in every act of speaking, writing, and behaving linguistically (Gee, 2001). Literacy also includes a multifaceted set of social practices using technology, participation with knowledge of text, social uses of the text, and an analysis of the text (Luke & Freebody, 1999). The combination of these literary skills will create effective communicators and learners in today's society.

Literacy begins at an early stage of development for children. Early literacy acquisition is a subconscious activity. As children are born they begin to acquire literacy through activities and interaction in their environment. Heath states that, "literacy events are occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies (Heath 1982). Encouraging any form of speaking, reading, or writing, at any early stage will enhance the student's development in literacy. Teachers and parents can serve as demonstrators, mediators, and guides in educating children on how to become literate individuals. Parents especially, need to take action and interact with their children on a daily basis. They can do this by engaging in everyday conversations, asking their child about a book they read, or reading to their son/daughter at home. The more exposure that a child has to literacy the more confident they will feel in their reading and writing skills.

As children begin to grow older and start to go to school their relationship with literacy begins to expand, where the child is forced to find a deeper meaning of what literature means to them and how

to incorporate it into their everyday lifestyles. The interaction between the reader's language and the writer's language influences the ease in which text can be processed by the reader (Kucer, 2005).

Another contributing factor that can affect the reader's transaction with print is the strategies provided to them and their capability of being familiar and using a particular strategy (Kucer, 2005). A strategy is the representation of a cognitive process or a behavior that an individual engages in that helps them create meaning in a written discourse. Strategies can occur at any given moment and the reader can use more than one strategy at any given time (Kucer, 2005). As students progress through their primary and elementary school years, they are exposed to multiple strategies by their classroom teachers. As students learn these strategies, they then are able to practice them in their reading, while also finding the strategies that are most helpful to their learning.

As a reader, it is not only important to learn a variety of strategies to help you make meaning of the text, but it is also critical to discover the author's purpose behind their writing. Ultimately, reading is a goal directed and purposeful process. With not all of the text being read for the same reason or even in the same way, the reader must be able to decipher, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, what must be done in order for the goal to be attained. (Kucer, 2005). The more the reader's and author's backgrounds parallel each other, the easier the construction of meaning is likely to be for the participant (Kucer, 2005). Background knowledge on a particular text impacts the reader's ultimate understanding of what they have read. When an individual is reading they are ultimately finding a purpose for reading a text and they search for background knowledge as they are reading (Kucer, 2005). A reader does not generally initiate a task without a purpose or reason; this same philosophy applies to their intentions when reading and writing. When an individual is able to apply their personal experiences to what they are reading, it allows them to illustrate the relationship among their goals, plans, and processing, which in turn will change their nature in reading (Kucer, 2005). The impact of background knowledge on the reading process has been one reason that teachers try to use thematic units in their classrooms. With the use of a thematic unit, the teacher is then able to present a

topic and then continue to build on the students' prior knowledge (Kucer, 2005). This is why it is imperative to provide students with useful background knowledge of any text and explain to them why they are participating in the activity, even if it is as simple as "just for enjoyment."

Kucer (2005), make a point to discuss the influence that theories have in a classroom. A theory is defined as an explanation of a particular phenomenon that captures its most significant elements or factors and their transactions; it attempts to explain its deep structure (Kucer, 2005). There are three main affects that theories have on a classroom. The first is that they allow for greater understanding of a text. In order for students to be able to read and interact with print they need to understand how the process operates. Next, a theory allows the teacher to anticipate how well students might be able to process and understand a particular text. Lastly, it allows us to understand the phenomenon itself. This means it promotes the literacy development in our students by the types of reading material selected or the types of instructional support provided before, during, or after reading is initiated (Kucer, 2005).

Research Question

In this research paper I am posing the question; what strategies can teachers use to support comprehension in struggling readers? With this question I will research different types of comprehension strategies and how they can serve as a tool, helping to increase the child's knowledge of a text.

Literature Review

In order for students to have success in reading they must be able to successfully comprehend what they are reading. "Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading" (Burgess, Hill, Morrison, Sargent & Hill p.361) This statement made by the National Institute for Literacy seems to fully encompass the meaning of reading comprehension. Comprehension is the understanding of the text and frequently requires explanations, interpretations, applications, perspectives, empathizing, and self-monitoring (p.362). Most educators would agree that the purpose of reading is to develop meaning from the text.

Students will quickly discover that it is in the earlier grades that the foundation of reading comprehension skills must be laid. If the foundation is in place, the upper grade teachers will have an easier time helping students in answering questions and making meaning from the text (Kinniburgh & Prew, 2010, p. 37). In 2000, the National Reading Panel published a report emphasizing the importance of reading comprehension as one of the “big ideas” of reading. “Learning to read is one of the most crucial processes children are involved in at school” (Keer & Vanderline, 2010, p. 33). In order to become a proficient reader it takes hard work; it is not an easy task for everyone. Also, reading should not only be practiced in school. In order for a child to become a successful reader, there must also be a follow through at home. Practicing literacy at home is just as important, then practicing at school. With home and school working together, the child is bound to have a higher success rate in comprehension.

At Home

“Children’s reading comprehension develops in a rich context of direct and indirect factors that influence the child’s ability to understand what they have read” (Katzir, Kim, & Lesaux, 2009, p. 261). It is suggested that early literacy skills such as phonological processing, letter recognition, and positive attitudes towards reading are developed in the early stages of a child’s life through both their interactions at school and at home (p. 262). Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim (2009) examine the relationships that are developed between reading comprehension, reading self-concept, and the child’s home literacy environment (p. 265). In this study data was collected using fourth grade students to determine the effects that self concept plays on the child’s overall reading comprehension abilities. In order to examine the role of child and family literacy practices and their relationship with comprehension there are three main questions that must be investigated. They are: Are child and family literacy practices associated with fourth graders reading comprehension skills? Is reading self-concept related to reading comprehension? Are child and family literacy practices related to children’s self-concept (p. 265)?

Self-Concept is the way that an individual thinks about themselves, and in this case how they believe in themselves as a reader. “When children perceive that they have the ability to accomplish a particular task, they tend to perform at higher levels and will be motivated to select increasingly challenging tasks” (p. 263). Children that are exposed to more literacy practices at home have a tendency to have a more positive attitude towards reading. The reason for this is that the child is immersed into print at the emergent stage, allowing them to make more meaningful connections with the text. As students begin to get older, the demands in reading begin to increase, causing them to have more experience in reading. Students who lack that exposure at a young age tend to fall behind, making reading a more challenging task (p. 273). Hall (2004) also agrees that the way that students view themselves as readers can play a huge impact on the ways that they approach text and their willingness to want to participate in text at all (Hall, 2004, p. 91). Aspects of reading motivation have shown that students with self-efficacy for reading have intrinsic motivation to read, but many low-achieving readers try to avoid engaging in reading at all (Barbosa, Coddington, Guthrie, Klauda, McRae, & Wigfield, 2009, p. 196).

Children are generally influenced by the example that is set by their parents. Katzir, Lesaux, and Kim’s (2009) study has shown that children’s motivation for reading was associated with their parents’ identification with reading for pleasure (Katzir, Kim, & Lesaux, 2009, p. 272). If a child sees one of their parents reading a book for enjoyment than the child will most likely pick up a book for pleasure as well. Another benefit worth discussing is student’s that have the opportunity to visit local libraries. Children’s visits to the library have a positive relationship in the child’s ability to comprehend text and identify words within the text. Visiting the library is wonderful exposure for students, especially children at the emergent age (p.272).

These home literacy’s correspond with Kucer (2005) and his theories behind making connections as a reader. Creating background knowledge is one of the best practices for children when trying to comprehend what they are reading. When a student is able to connect with a text and find

meaning behind what they are reading, then they are able to produce a purpose of why they are participating in the text. By exposing children at a young age to print, parents are given their child the necessary skills to become a skilled reader.

In School

A reading strategy is a plan or technique that is used by students to gather information that they will need from a text. These strategies are generally taught starting at an early age in the child's schooling. There are multiple styles of comprehension strategies that students may use to help foster their understanding of a text. Questioning, predicting, activating prior knowledge, making connections, and finding the main idea can all be used by an individual before, during, or after participating in a text. Providing young students with some procedures they could use while reading will help promote comprehension and develop awareness of the value of using different strategies to pursue positive reading behaviors (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p. 220). Furthermore, the National Reading Panel defines effective reading comprehension instruction as the "procedures that guide students as they attempt to read or write" (Block, Cleveland, Parris, Reed, & Whiteley, 2009, p. 262).

"I have read the chapter three times and still can't find the answer to this question!" is a statement made by many frustrated readers (Kinniburgh & Prew, 2010, p. 31). Often students use the strategy of looking back and re-reading what they have just read. Going back and looking at the story helps the student find specifically the answer that they are looking for (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 68). Kinniburgh and Prew (2010) studied the effects of using the strategy QAR to help students make meaning of the text. This is a specific look back strategy that categorizes using the text as a guide in four different ways. QAR stands for Question Answer Relationship and is used to help students understand that the answer to a question is directly related to the type of question asked (Kinniburgh & Prew, 2010, p. 32). If the question presents a literal type of answer then the student can use the text and complete a "right there" type of answer. A second method in the QAR foundation is called "Author and You". This is where the student must use textual information in

addition to their own background knowledge and experiences. If the student must use their own background knowledge and not information in the text, then it is referred to as an “In My Head” type of question. The last style of question that QAR teaches the reader is for questions that require the student to look in multiple places in the text to find the answer. This type of question is called “Think and Search” (p. 32).

In order to effectively conduct this study, students in primary grades were used over a four week period (p.34). All the teachers that participated in this study were thoroughly trained in how to teach and implement the QAR strategies. They were shown engaging lessons to capture the young students on how to use each style of question. The results show Question Answer Relationship is a strategy that is believed to lead to growth in reading comprehension, especially in primary grade students (p. 33). Students at the early stages of literacy were able to identify words associated with each question style and use those key words to help them answer a specific question (p. 35).

Questioning is one way to engage the readers and help them make sense of what they are reading. One thing to be aware of is the type of question that is asked. Questions can be helpful when differentiating by ability and while pushing the reader to extend their thinking (p.68). Questioning can be effective before, during, and after reading. Good forms of questioning can promote interpretive discussions and critical thinking about the text that was just read (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p.219). When students respond to questions during reading, their understanding of the text is stronger than if they just simply read it (p.220). When a teacher uses higher-order questions, the discussion is more engaging, activating the student’s attention (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 69). At times teachers will use the questions before even participating in the text, having students read the questions that they will be expected to answer. By pre-viewing the questions it helps the reader know what they are looking for (p. 70). Another way of using questioning is having students create their own questions. By creating their own questions it allows students to reflect on what they were wondering before they read, what they are pondering as they are reading, and what they are still

thinking when they are finished reading (p. 70). When students are taught to ask and answer questions on information text, they are then being challenged to infer relations between sentences, draw concepts maps based on the text, and describe key ideas that are in the text, by doing all of this the reader is ultimately creating a deeper understanding of new words and meaning of what they have just read (Barbosa, Coddington, Guthrie, Klauda, McRae, & Wigfield, 2009, p. 209).

The National Institute for Literacy states that there are seven core strategies to help readers become successful. They are: monitoring comprehension, metacognition, graphic organizers, answering questions, generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing (Burgess, Hill, Morrison, Sargent & Hill p. 362). In order to effectively teach these strategies the educator must participate in “Guided Reading,” allowing the focus of teaching before, during, and after reading activities to foster the child’s comprehension of the text (p. 363). “The classroom teachers are in the best position to identify individual’s strengths and needs and adjust a curriculum to address them”(p. 363). Participating in guided reading activities allows the teacher to differentiate their instruction to meet the direct needs of each child in their room.

Once students reach their upper elementary years, they are faced with the pressures of standardized tests. When the stakes for testing are high, teachers feel the pressure to raise their tests scores any way that they can (p. 363). To conduct a study to learn more about the effects of standardized testing vs. teaching effective strategies, 382 elementary school teachers participated in an online survey. The survey consisted of asking questions that allowed teachers to state their opinions about experiences, attitudes, and practices that they use in their specific classrooms. After completing the study the participants discussed how purpose-setting activities help their students comprehend what they have read. Some examples of strategies used to reinforce this are comparing and contrasting, recognizing the literary genres, and distinguishing the difference between fact and opinion (p. 367).

Instructionally spending the time to teach students these strategies is a key ingredient in making comprehension successful. Many teachers find that using worksheets or workbooks to teach a skill is

an effective teaching method. Workbook practices follows Skinner's (1958) model of program instruction in which it provides the following: a specific outline set of material for the students to master, a series of questions that require some form of a response, material that is gradually presented with a high level of difficulty, material that requires the child to gradually respond to a task at each step along the way, and for each student to proceed at his or her own pace (Block, Cleveland, Parris, Reed, & Whiteley, 2009, p. 263). Klinger, Urbach, Golos, Brownwell, and Menon study (2010) would have to disagree, believing that many teachers are forgetting one very important part to all of this, the actual instruction. When conducting a study to determine how special education teachers teach reading to third through fifth grade students, they observed 124 lessons. Within these lesson, 42 of them did not incorporate any comprehension activities, in 30 lessons the only comprehension piece that was incorporated was asking the students questions about what they have read, and in 49 of the lessons that were observed teachers provided additional comprehension instruction, even though they were mostly prompting students to use a strategy rather than using direct instruction of a strategy (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 64).

Making predictions is one of the most common strategies that teachers use or encourage their students to use. (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 69). Teachers ask the students to guess what will come next and use context clues to support their answer. Some questions you may hear when asking a child to make a prediction are: What will happen next? Just from looking at the cover and reading the title, what do you think this story is going to be about? What are we going to learn about today (p. 69)? Teachers may also encourage their students to take a "picture walk," encouraging their students to look closely at each picture in the book to help them make the prediction. By asking students these questions and allowing them to truly think about the text, before engaging helps the student find the purpose for reading. A common mistake that teachers make during this process is not following up after reading the text. There are so many instances when a child makes a

prediction, but the teacher never goes back to check if that prediction was right or wrong, making their prediction seem invalid (p. 69).

Activating prior knowledge is key to helping students make sense of a text. If the child can somehow connect to what they are reading or have a life experience that allows them to connect to the text, then it makes the comprehension of the book a lot easier (p.69). Integrating background knowledge is a way to support students as they read (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p. 218). Teachers may prompt students to think about their life experiences before, during, or after reading a book. Students can also share their experiences with the class, hoping to spark a different connection in a classmate (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 69). Meaningful conversations are a significant skill to incorporate in having students truly understand the meaning of what was read (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p. 220). Getting students to actively build meaning while reading requires close attention to the text in ways that promote attending to important ideas and finding connections between them. (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p. 245).

Finding the main idea of what you have read is simply constructing main thoughts from the text. In order to effectively find the main idea, the reader must distinguish what events in the story are the most significant. By doing so it is allowing the reader to extend and monitor their thinking as a reader (Chard, Gardill, Hoppes, Jitendra, & Renouf, 2001, p. 54). Evidence has shown that discovering the main idea is a critical comprehension strategy that a reader must possess in order to become a skilled reader (p. 54). It is a strategic process that can engage the reader in the text structure and help one make meaning of what they have read (p. 54). Teachers must consider the importance of teaching main idea and learn how to effectively link the story's grammar and characters in order to help readers fully understand the main purpose of the text (p. 71).

Many students with Learning disabilities struggle tremendously with reading. They generally have difficulty with skills such as planning, organizing information and ideas, initiating and maintaining focus on activities, selecting relevant task goals, choosing and changing strategies, self-

monitoring, and regulating behavior (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 60). A struggling reader can be defined as an individual that has fallen two or more years below their intellectual level (Hall, 2004, p. 77).

Struggling readers tend to find narrative text easier to understand, versus expository texts. Expository text structures can be in many different forms and can be difficult for students to comprehend (Dornisch, Ramsay, Sperling, 2008, 552). Strategies to help struggling readers generally require incorporating before, during, and after reading components. These strategies require students to develop background knowledge about the topic they are reading, summarizing key ideas, and asking questions while they are reading (Brownell, Golos, Klingner, Menon, & Urbach, 2010, p. 69). Students in this category appear to have their own unique strengths and weakness, but generally they are centered on making sense of what has been read, especially in the content areas of science, math, and social studies (Hall, 2004, p. 75). Concepts such as mathematics may be introduced in texts way too quickly while science and social studies text may have information that is irrelevant to the reader (p. 76). This can make reading this style of text very challenging and frustrating, especially for students with learning needs. Keeping this in mind, it is important for teachers to consider ways to help these struggling readers when having to face these types of difficult texts.

Content related textbooks remain to be the primary source of information in many academic levels. Teachers use the textbook to drive instruction. Unfortunately, while using a textbook, students are generally given no guidance from their instructor as far as how to understand the assigned text. Therefore, leaving students to understand the content material on their own, leaving these struggling students frustrated and confused (Dornisch, Ramsay, & Sperling, 2008, p. 552). Before reading a text, especially an expository text, it is critical to introduce the students to new vocabulary words that they might encounter while reading. Teaching vocabulary can enhance comprehension instruction and provide the students with meaningful connections to the text (Beck, Blake, McKeown, 2009, p. 219). Expository texts contain content-specific vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to the reader, and they do

not always give enough background knowledge to help the reader understand the new information (Hall, 2004, p. 75).

A child's failure to understand expository text can lead to multiple negative consequences. These can include: not learning the required content, failing to pass standardized tests, low self-esteem, and behavior problems (p. 77). Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to encourage positive strategies to help these students succeed. Investigators have proposed that low-achieving students can be motivated by having relatable experiences to their culture and the text or by adapting text to help meet the needs of these learners (Barbosa, Coddington, Guthrie, Klauda, McRae, & Wigfield, 2009, p. 196).

Students spending time just reading is an important aspect of enhancing comprehension. Readers should be spending at least 15-20 minutes a day just independently reading. Increasing the amount of time that children have to read independently has been studied as one way in which readers can improve their comprehension (Block, Cleveland, Parris, Reed, & Whiteley, 2009, p. 262). For a student to be able to effectively read on their own they must have a book that is just right. Teachers generally create classroom libraries, providing opportunities for students to find books right in the classroom. Some researches would suggest that low level readers are having difficulty finding books of interest in their classroom selection, causing students to become less motivated to read (p. 262). Too many of the texts are fitted for the higher readers in the classroom. Another critical factor that is involved in reading independently is having enough time during the day to just read. Some classrooms are not allotting enough time for students to participate with their text. Students that enjoy engaging with book will then continue their reading journey at home, while students that already struggle with reading will not spend the extra time reinforcing their skills (p. 263). It has been discovered that students are most successful when allowing them to have a choice over what they are reading, reading more than seven pages of a text in a continuous pattern, and being given at 15-20 minutes of silent reading during the school day (p. 278).

Not only is it important for students to interact and learn about text through teacher driven instruction, but it is crucial that students can learn from one another. Peer tutoring has been proven to be a positive tool to help encourage reading comprehension. Not only is it promoting students to learn from a peer, but it is reinforcing independent learning. At times students have a tendency to rely solely on their teacher to help them when they get stuck, causing students to become passive learners (Keer & Vanderline, 2010, p. 34). In order for students to become self-regulated readers and thinkers it is imperative that students take an active role in solving their own problems while reading a text (Keer, 2004, p. 39). Not only should children have conversations with their peers about what they are reading, they should also discuss how they are reading parts of the story as well, teaching each other what strategies work best (p. 39).

A “peer tutor” can be defined as individuals from a similar social grouping who is not a professional teacher to help another individual learn, and also learn themselves through teaching (Keer & Vanderline, 2010, p. 35). Allowing classmates to use peer-tutors encompasses multiple skills such as peer interaction and discussions along with self-regulating strategies to help understand the meaning of what has been read (p. 34). Studies have found that peer collaboration has a positive reinforcement at promoting reading strategies. A person can truly internalize information and deepen its meaning when having to teach others (p. 41). Also, children’s knowledge about the process of reading and using reading strategies can increase when hearing their classmates discuss relatable reading experiences (Keer, 2004, p. 39).

In conclusion it is apparent that the strategies that are taught at home are a building block to helping students to be successfully in school. The more exposure and practice that students get from their home, the greater the transfer the skills will be while reading at school. Also, it is critical for students to learn a variety of strategies to help foster their comprehension. By engaging in multiple modes of reading, it will allow students to form a deeper meaning and purpose behind what they are reading.

Methods

Context

This research was conducted at Pac-Mal Intermediate School which is part of the Pac-Mal Central School District. Pac-Mal is a rural school located in southwestern Wayne County. Pac-Mal Intermediate currently has 426 third through fifth grade students. 96% of their students are Caucasian, 1% Asian, 1% Hispanic, and 1% African American. The Ethnic make up of Pac-Mal has remained constant with no major changes over the last 3-5 years. In addition, the attendance rate is exceptional having an Annual Attendance Rate of 96%. Pac-Mal Central School District mission is to empower their students with the knowledge they will need in our changing world. In order to do this the district has a total of 421 employees. Of these 421 employees, 52% are teaching staff, 42% support staff, and 5% administrative staff.

Pac-Mal Intermediate takes pride in their on-going parent support. There is a strong parent support network called the PTSO (Parent Teacher Student Organization). Not only does the PTSO help sponsor events, such as Family Movie Nights, Family BINGO Nights, and School Carnival, they also support classroom instruction providing rich and meaningful opportunities for students to participate in extra class field trips and presentations. Each year Pac-Mal's PTSOs contribute around \$20,000 to their schools.

Lastly, Pac-Mal Intermediate offers multiple extra-curricular activities for their students. These activities consist of Ski-Club, Chorus, Band, All-County Chorus, Raiderbots, Yearbook Club, Battle of the Books Club, Math 24 Club, Math Excellence lessons, Claymation, and Pac-Mal Way Student Ambassador Club.

Participant

Jared is a nine year old Caucasian male that is currently a fourth grade student at Pac-Mal Intermediate. Jared is in a general education classroom that consists of 22 students, 14 females and 8 males. Jared is reading at a beginning of third grade level and currently has a 504 plan in place. Jared's

504 includes modifications when given tasks, such as having directions read or simplified, giving him refocusing reminders when needed, whether they are done visually or verbally, extended time on test, the use of a graphic organizer for tests, and administering tests in a location with minimal distractions. Jared also is prescribed glasses that help him with his near and far sightedness. Jared is well-liked by his peers but struggles with his insecurities about his academic abilities.

To begin our individual sessions with each other it was important for me, as his teacher, to get a full understanding of how he views himself as a reader. In order to do that Jared participated in an interview where I asked him a couple of questions of how he values reading (Appendix A). After completing this interview I was able to learn that Jared does enjoy reading, but struggles with sticking with one book at a time. Often, he feels as if he gets stuck with what is happening in the story, therefore making it difficult to continue on. Also, Jared admitted that he does not frequently read at home, causing him to forget what is happening in the book. Lastly, it was evident that while picking a book it is extremely important for him to find one that is interesting and that he can connect with. Being that Jared is a struggling reader, sometimes it can get frustrating for him to find a chapter book of interest. Generally, he enjoys picture books because they are shorter and have illustrations to support what he is reading, but he feels that his peers may look at him differently because of this, making him pick books that may not be appropriate or good fit books for him.

Researcher's Stance

As a researcher, I am taking the stance of an active participant observer, where I am fully engaged in teaching Jared comprehension strategies (Mills, 2011). By doing this it has allowed me to closely monitor the progress of Jared and his work. It also provides me with the opportunity to make accommodations as needed in order to ensure a positive learning experience for him. I have decided to use Jared as my participant because we have already created a working relationship with each other, as he is one of the students in my fourth grade class. I found it to be most beneficial for Jared to work

one-on-one, as he is easily distracted with others in a group. I also will use feedback from his reading to teacher, to help monitor any issues that may occur during the time that she is working with him.

Methods

As Jared's classroom teacher, I began by conducting an interview with him discussing his feeling of himself as a reader. Having Jared participate in this interview allows me, the observer, to get a better understanding of how Jared views himself as a reader and discover what comprehension strategies Jared uses already as he is reading.

One comprehension strategy that Jared would benefit from is practicing making appropriate predictions. Being Jared's classroom teacher I have already noticed that Jared struggles with this. He does not use the text or picture clues on the page to help him make a prediction that would be appropriate with the text provided. In order to help him with this I began by working with Jared by modeling how to make an appropriate prediction. For Jared's first couple of sessions I started with teaching Jared what a prediction is and how it helps us as a reader. After discussing the purpose of making predictions, I modeled how I would make a prediction based on a text at Jared's reading level. Next, once I feel confident that Jared has been exposed to the correct ways of making a prediction, I provided Jared with guided opportunities to complete the task. For example, I used post-it notes where Jared and I stopped together, look at the text and illustrations, and then make a prediction together. Once Jared felt confident in his ability to complete a prediction independently and once the observer felt that Jared is ready, I provided Jared a text on his own where he had to make predictions before reading, as well as write down his reasons for making this prediction, what clues did you use to help you make this prediction? After Jared completes this task, we read the text together, to check for the accuracy of his prediction. The tools that were used to monitor Jared's success were graphic organizers, post-its, and verbal responses.

Findings and Discussions

This study was designed to gain insight into what types of strategies are beneficial for struggling readers and their comprehension. Through research, it is recommended that students engage in pre-reading, during reading, and after reading practices that will enhance the meaning of what the child has read. In this particular study I have focused on the strategy of making predictions. I have used a child within my own fourth grade classroom that has difficulty making predictions while reading. During this study it was critical for Jared, a fourth grade student, and me to not only practice making predictions, but for him to learn why we make predictions and how it is helpful in our reading. While working with Jared, I was able to see how making reasonable predictions does support comprehension and found that it allowed Jared to build confidence in his reading abilities. Through action research, it was observed and noted that Jared benefited from the direct instruction, frequent modeling, and independent practice of making predictions while reading. Jared and I were able to work one-on-one with each other, while his classmates were participating in our Daily Five workshop time.

For each session Jared and I would sit at my kidney table that is located towards the back of the classroom. As we were working with one another, we had minimal distractions from the other students in the classroom. At times, Jared would begin working with me right after seeing our reading specialist for 15 minutes, making his focus a little more challenging.

One of the first activities that Jared and I participated in with each other was a basic interview. Conducting this interview was valuable in the fact that it taught me that Jared does seem to care what others think and that we need to eliminate his discomfort with his reading level. Secondly, it reinforced the value in teaching him predicting strategies, just one type of comprehension strategy, which will hopefully excite him to continue with a book. By using post-its and making predictions he was able to see the purpose in reading and it seemed to encourage him to finish the task at hand.

Direct Instruction

During the school year, I have found that making predictions by using picture clues or even text clues has been very difficult for Jared. In my research I have learned that it is the classroom teacher's

job to begin by teaching the students the expectation before expecting them to become proficient in it. Using this knowledge, I started our sessions by discussing what a prediction is and why we use them to enhance comprehension. A prediction is making an educated guess of what you think might happen next in a story. When making predictions we are not always right, but it gives us a purpose to continue on as a reader. Some ways that we can make predictions are by taking a picture walk, looking at captions, or as we are reading stopping and asking ourselves questions such as, what will happen next? Generally when making a prediction we use statements like I think... because or I know that will happen, because the book states ...

Modeling

Most often predictions are made at the beginning of a book, but students should be encouraged to not only make predictions at the beginning of a text, but throughout the whole story. It was important for Jared to understand that sometimes we make a prediction at the beginning of a story, but as we read our prediction might alter based on new evidence in the text. During our beginning lessons on predictions I used a lot of modeling to show Jared what my thought process is while making a prediction. For starters I used picture books. Jared and I together would take a picture walk of the book. Looking specifically at all the illustrations, pointing out characters' facial expressions and the setting to help give Jared background knowledge of what the book was about. Jared initially would skim quickly through each page. For example, he would see a dog and state, "I hope that I get a new dog soon! My Dad says that we can go to Lollipop Farm to find one." Right then, I would stop Jared and ask, "Does that have to do with what is occurring in our story?" He was able to respond with, "no" allowing us to have the discussion that just because there is a dog in the picture doesn't mean that it is going to be a story about your own personal dog. This is definitely an area that Jared continually got distracted with. Instead of making predictions to illustrations, he wanted to create his own stories that were related to his own personal life. In order to break that habit, I continued to model predicting with Jared, walking him through each illustration myself and then using the same text, ask him to do the

same thing. This was beneficial, especially using a text that he was already familiar with. After completing each picture walk, together we would read the text and discuss if our predictions were correct. If our predictions were wrong we would talk about how what happened in the book that was different from the predictions that we made. After repeating this process a few times, Jared seemed to feel more comfortable with the procedure. We continued to use the same strategy for the next couple of sessions, just discussing the predictions, rather than writing them down. As we continued to work on this, I began to slowly allow Jared to make the picture walks and discuss the illustrations on his own, only guiding him and giving him help when needed.

Independent Practice

Eventually, I began to have Jared complete this task independently and instead of talking about the prediction, he was able to write down what he thought would happen on a post-it note. Jared and I would then read the text together and discuss whether the prediction he made was valid or not. As we continued working on this skill Jared began to make comments such as, “Now I can see how making predictions can make reading more exciting and how it allows me to stop and think about a book.” Hearing statements like this was reassuring, knowing that he was beginning to truly grasp the reason behind making predictions. Not only did Jared prove that he was enjoying reading more verbally, but he began to improve his accelerated reader scores. Accelerated reader is an online computer test that students take after completing a book. The test gives students five to ten comprehension questions based on the text that was just read. This gives the teacher a quick assessment of how students are doing with their independent reading.

The next step that Jared and I began to focus on was making predictions using short chapter books. Although Jared was making progress through picture books, it is imperative that he is able to use the same strategy when using more challenging texts. In order to prepare Jared to make predictions without using pictures I began by using the same teaching method as before, modeling. I would begin reading a couple pages from the text and then stop to think aloud what I think might happen next. I

continued using this approach and eventually had Jared making a prediction as well. Not only did Jared and I have to make a prediction, but we had to support our prediction using information from the text. As a reader it is important to give concrete examples to support your opinion. This is a skill that students are asked to do frequently as they reach higher grade levels. In order to practice this, I made a graphic organizer (Appendix B) that encouraged Jared to not only make the prediction but prove why he could make it.

Using this higher level thinking was a bit intimidating at first. Jared frequently would want to respond with, “well that is just what I think, that is how I know.” Jared then reached the point of frustration, by stating “this is becoming way too much work.” Fortunately, with a lot of modeling and practice Jared began to change his mindset and become a little bit more at ease with the process. As Jared continued to work on using the graphic organizer effectively, he realized that it helped him to remember what he read, but making a quick statement of what did happen versus what he predicted. He was then able to come back to his graphic organizer before beginning to read the next day. Eventually, I allowed Jared to complete this task independently at his seat, to make sure that he was able to use the strategy on his own. In order to do this I marked pages using a post-it note where I would like him to stop and make the prediction before continuing on in the text. The hope is that he will then carry over this strategy into each text that he is reading, whether it is fiction or non-fiction.

Implications

The findings from my research suggest several implications for me as a teacher. While, there are many strategies that you can use with your students to support comprehension, I find that teaching effective predicting skills is valuable for readers at any level. Making predictions is a simple task, which if taught and modeled properly can be helpful to all students. When working with Jared, I was able to see how useful making predictions were to his understanding of the text. It provided him with a focus and a goal while reading. Before using this strategy effectively, Jared seems to be scattered in his

reading, not able to stick with one particular book at a time. By using post-its and making predictions he was able to see the purpose in reading and it seemed to encourage him to finish the task at hand.

During the time that was allotted for Jared and me, I was able to see his hard work and determination to better himself as a reader. Jared began to build his self-confidence in reading, which also played a huge role in his success. Students' self-perception is a huge issue, especially when students reach the older grades. As a teacher, I have learned to build my students confidence, allowing them to enjoy reading and not to be embarrassed about the text that they choose.

Limitations

If given the opportunity to further my research there are a couple of things that I would try to enhance my finding. The first thing that I would attempt is possibly incorporating two more students at different levels. Ideally I would have liked to compare how predicting would help low, average, and high students. I am curious to see if using the same strategies that I used with Jared, would be helpful to all readers or if it is more valuable to struggling readers. Secondly, I would have like to also incorporate non-fiction text. Due to the amount of time given to us, I was only able to use fictional text to practice predicting. A well-rounded reader would also need to use these same skills and strategies when using non-fiction texts. Lastly, I would have possibly tried using another effective comprehension strategy like summarizing to see if that helped Jared after reading a text. In this particular study, with the time given, I thought it would be beneficial to focus on only one reading comprehension strategy. In the future, I think it would be beneficial to teach a couple of strategies to see which strategy is most effective for Jared. He showed extreme growth using before reading and during reading strategies with predicting, I only wonder if he would show even more growth if given a couple of strategies to chose from.

Conclusions

After completing this study, I was able to learn that students can benefit from using reading strategies to enhance their comprehension. In particular I learned the value in modeling and using

direct instruction to teach students how to use each type of strategy. Working with Jared has given my insight into the minds of my struggling readers. As a teacher you cannot assume that your students understand a strategy, even if you know that it is one that they have learned in previous years. For example predicting, students begin taking picture walks and making predictions at their early stages of schooling. Although students may be taught how to take the picture walk, it is important to reinforce why we use them and how it can help us as a reader.

Using direct instruction to reinforce skills was extremely valuable in this scenario. By modeling and teaching Jared the proper way to make a prediction allowed him the opportunity to grow as a reader. Students need to be given examples and shown through think alouds the proper way to complete a task. Not only does this help them to fully understand what they are doing, but it sets an expectation for students as to what you are looking for.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What do you enjoy most about reading?
2. How do you view yourself as a reader?
3. What are your strengths? Areas of improvement?
4. What strategies do you use when reading?
5. As reader, why do you think it is important to make predictions?

Appendix B

Graphic Organizer – helping with predictions

Prediction	Evidence from Text
<p style="text-align: center;">Was my Prediction correct? Yes or No Explain Why</p>	