Retelling Using Different Methods

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Retelling Using Different Methods

Abstract
This study examines different methods of retelling and the effects of these methods on the quality of retelling produced. I claim that different methods of retelling will elicit varying quality of retellings. Data was collected through asking two first graders to retell stories that I had read to them using different methods. The study shows that confidence, memory, and cognitive demand of the retelling task, as well as visual cues and prompting play a role in retelling quality. Retelling is a strategy that is easy to use and can be easily adapted to meet the needs of different types of text.

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Abstract

This study examines different methods of retelling and the effects of these methods on the quality of retelling produced. I claim that different methods of retelling will elicit varying quality of retellings. Data was collected through asking two first graders to retell stories that I had read to them using different methods. The study shows that confidence, memory, and cognitive demand of the retelling task, as well as visual cues and prompting play a role in retelling quality. Retelling is a strategy that is easy to use and can be easily adapted to meet the needs of different types of text.
Introduction

It is generally well known that reading is more than decoding; reading involves understanding, interpreting, and thinking about texts (Beers, 2003). While reading involves the words on the page, it also incorporates the meaning behind the words. In other words, comprehension is essential to reading and literacy. Comprehension involves understanding a text, and once that is achieved, it opens the mind up for new ideas. Comprehension is the second step on Bloom’s Taxonomy, and leads to higher levels of thinking, including application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which in turn lead to new and different ways of thinking about a text (Cohen & Cowan, 2011). The levels above comprehension on Bloom’s Taxonomy lead to the creation of something new, applying thoughts from the text to a new situation, new platforms for reasoning based on a text, and countless other things. Therefore, not only is comprehension essential for reading, it opens up the reader to new ideas and experiences.

Although comprehension is essentially the goal of reading, there are many students who struggle with this aspect of literacy. While they may be able to read the words on the page, they are unable to put any meaning behind the words. Additionally, many students can read and comprehend, but cannot remember the story when they are asked any questions about it. These problems with comprehension are common in students of all ages and abilities, and have widespread effects. For example, students who do not comprehend may not see the purpose in reading, and will therefore be unmotivated to read. Additionally, lack of comprehension can impact students’ test scores on yearly state tests, the SAT, and others. As students progress from primary grades to upper grades, they will miss out on important content area learning that is transmitted through reading. This lack of comprehension will not only affect students’
understanding in language arts, but in other subjects, like social studies, science, and even math. Therefore, comprehension is a vital skill for students to have as they go through school.

Comprehension can be fostered in students throughout the reading process using before, during, and after reading activities (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2008). These strategies can be used starting in kindergarten, and can continue through high school. For the purposes of this project, I focused specifically on after-reading, or postreading strategies. After reading strategies are activities that are done after finishing reading a text, and serve to help students understand what they have read, pick out important parts, and generate further thinking related to the text. Some after reading strategies include discussing, summarizing, and retelling, among others. Postreading strategies are often neglected as teachers rapidly move from topic to topic, but when executed effectively, they can serve to review, refine, and generate new ideas about a text (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin, 2008).

In this study, I focused specifically on retelling as a postreading strategy. Retelling is a skill that calls on students to tell the story again in their own words in the correct order. In order to do this, students must remember the story, pick out the important pieces, and tell the story once again in the correct order. A retelling is different than a summary in that a summary reduces story length and only reports main ideas or topics, while a retelling recounts all story events, details, and even story language and phrases. Retelling is a skill that helps students organize, summarize, and process information that they have read or heard (Beers, 2003). This skill is important for students of all ages, and when taught at a young age, has the potential to help students with comprehension as they get older and read more complex texts. Although retelling is best suited for fiction texts and stories, can be adapted enhance reading of informational texts (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin).
For this study, I read students a story and asked them to retell the story individually. I used a different method of retelling each time in an effort to determine if the method of retelling affects the quality of retelling. Students were asked to retell the story with as many details as they could remember, and were evaluated with a rubric to determine accurate retelling of story elements. Story elements include characters, plot, problem, solution, and setting (Cohen & Cowan, 2011). Although sequence is not considered a story element, it is important that in a retelling students strive for correct story sequence. I also observed the students as well as examined their preferences toward each type of retelling through interviews. This study found differences in retelling quality based on the method used, which results in several implications for teachers.

Theoretical Framework

To define literacy, I draw on Gee (2001) and Goodman (2001). Goodman (2001) echoes a sociocultural stance, defining literacy as “learning how to mean” through what she terms literacy events, or encounters with written or oral language in culturally meaningful activities (p. 317). This definition shows that literacy acquisition takes place in authentic contexts within the community of the learner. The events in which the learner participates show the uses and values of literacy in that context. Furthermore, Gee (2001) defines literacy as, “control of secondary uses of language.” (p. 23). This definition indicates that in order to be literate, one must have control over at least two discourses: that of home and that of an institution outside of the home. According to Gee, a person may control a different discourse for every social group of which he or she is a member, resulting in control of several discourses. Combining these two definitions, I define literacy as the ability to convey meaning through language in an appropriate way based on the context.
In this study, as it relates to Goodman, retelling is considered a literacy event that may require written or oral language, based on the type of retelling they are asked to do. Retelling often takes place in the school setting, but may also serve a purpose at home. It is meaningful both because it is a skill encountered daily in school, and because the skill enhances students’ ability to summarize a text and distinguish important story parts from less important ones. Participating in retelling shows the learner that this is a valued skill. Goodman’s work stems from sociocultural theory, which

Gee’s definition influences this study in that children will be asked to retell in different ways. Some will require use of school language and others will more closely reflect language used at home or during play. Students with a greater grasp of school language may not be affected by different types of retelling, while those who may struggle with school language may face challenges when faced with a task that requires them to use the discourse of school. Therefore, while Goodman states that language is learned and acquired based on social and cultural contexts, Gee adds that some students may be at a disadvantage based on how their home discourse compares to that of school.

Discourse is not the only factor that could affect this study. While all children in the study will be asked to participate in each type of retelling, children’s background may influence their preferences for a certain type as well as their performance. A child who has much experience drawing may prefer or perform better retelling through drawing, while a child whose culture values performance may prefer or perform better retelling through acting. In this way, retelling, as well as literacy as a whole, is a process unique to each learner and his or her background.
These ideas bring Gardener’s theory of multiple intelligences into the equation. In this theory, people are seen as having many different types of intelligences. There are eight areas of intelligence, and people have different strengths and weaknesses based on which intelligences are stronger (Olson & Platt, 2004). Using this theory, I will assume that each of the student involved in this project have many intelligences and different strengths. The theory will support this project because students may perform better or prefer using a certain type of retelling based on their learning style or dominant intelligences. For example, a student with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence may prefer to act out a retelling, while a student with logical-mathematical intelligence may prefer to retell using a graphic organizer. These intelligences can be enhanced by the child’s culture, and incorporates personal intelligences as well as sociocultural background. The theory of multiple intelligences may impact the study by providing insight into student performance and retelling option preference. In this way, this research is informed by sociocultural theory, critical literacy, and Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences.

**Research Question**

Given that literacy is a process unique to all learners, this action research project asks, how do different methods of retelling affect retell quality?

**Literature Review**

This literature review examines the strategy of retelling and some of the processes and issues surrounding this strategy. First, I will look at postreading activities, exploring what they are, their purpose and benefits, and specific postreading activities. Second, I will investigate the role that oral language has on reading and comprehension development. Third, I will examine retelling, including its goals, benefits, and specific strategies. Finally, I will discuss implications of the findings on retelling.
Postreading Activities

Reading is a skill that requires many processes, such as decoding, fluency, and word recognition. While the goal of reading is to comprehend what is contained within a text, it is important to note that reading and comprehension are two different processes (Kucer, 2010). Comprehension is often seen as something that occurs after reading, but in fact, it is a process that begins before reading and continues after it is done (Gill, 2008). Comprehension requires the reader to interact with the text, constructing meaning from a combination of information from the text itself as well as background knowledge (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). Fluency has been shown to help, but not cause comprehension (Cohen, Krustedt, & May, 2009; Kucer, 2008). Because comprehension is not solely based on the text, but also requires the interests and background of the reader, it is slightly different for each person (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). Readers’ background knowledge may lead them to insights different from each other, as well as some that the author may not have intended (Kucer, 2011).

In order to foster comprehension, teachers must provide experiences that require the reader to relate to and interact with the text (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). There are many strategies that teachers use to help students learn to comprehend. These strategies usually fall into three main categories: before-reading activities, during-reading activities, and after-reading activities (Gill, 2008). After-reading activities can also be referred to as postreading activities. Before-reading activities include such things as activating prior knowledge, predicting, and looking at illustrations in a book if there are any (Gill, 2008). During-reading activities can include questioning, inferring, and helping students understand text structure. Postreading strategies can include summarizing, retelling, or answering questions, among other
things (Gill, 2008). Often teachers assume that students automatically comprehend when they read, and thus skip over postreading activities, but such activities prove to be vital in students’ comprehension of texts.

Postreading strategies are designed to allow students to interact with the text, extend understanding, and solidify strategies, vocabulary, and concepts (Gill, 2008). Postreading strategies should be chosen with care because the activity can influence students’ comprehension or perception of what is important within a text (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). Atay & Durt (2006) suggests choosing postreading activities that are interactive and call on students to process the text rather than have the teacher review it for them. Gambrell, Pfeiffer, Kapinus, and Heathington (1988) add that not all postreading activities have equal outcomes or benefits, and that those requiring higher order thinking, such as reorganizing, summarizing, synthesizing, and applying, are more effective for comprehension and recall than those that require lower levels of cognition (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). During a postreading activity, students may be called upon to reflect, discuss, write, interpret, infer, analyze, create, or summarize, among other things (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Liang, Watkins, Graces, & Hopp, 2010). Liang et al (2010) suggest that postreading activities should include important points designed to foster better understanding and retention of material, which is often best achieved through overt and open-ended responses rather than multiple-choice activities (Liang, Watkins, Graces, & Hosp). While postreading strategies can benefit students in a variety of ways, Simpson (1994) upholds that these strategies are most effective when students have adequate background knowledge. In other words, postreading is not a solution to comprehension problems caused by lack of background knowledge. Baumann and Bergeron (1993) add that the effectiveness of postreading strategies depends on the demands of the next tasks. Postreading can indeed prepare students for
a follow-up activity, but a poorly matched postreading task and follow-up activity can render the postreading task ineffective (Baumannn & Bergeron, 1993). There are a variety of postreading tasks that can benefit students’ learning and comprehension.

Many studies examining the effectiveness of specific postreading strategies have been conducted. For example, Simpson (1994) describes the talk through strategy, in which students read and then talk about an expository text, such as a textbook. This strategy was shown to help students with generalization, higher order thinking, and summarizing skills. The talk through also actively engaged students with the material, which, according to Atay and Durt (2006), is an important component for an effective postreading strategy. Talk throughs can also enhance students’ understanding of certain topics. Additionally, this strategy can assist with recall of information, metacognitive awareness, and helping students identify what they do not understand (Simpson, 1994). Interactive postreading strategies can also help students learn vocabulary, especially in a second language, as well as make a reading task more appealing (Atay & Durt, 2006). According to Ahmadi (2005), only certain strategies work for helping students acquire vocabulary. For example, paraphrasing an expository text can be effective for helping students with vocabulary acquisition, while answering questions, generating questions, or skipping the postreading strategy altogether, generally are not (Ahmadi, 2005). Baumann and Bergeron (1993) studied story mapping as a postreading strategy. Story mapping is a strategy that calls on students to answer questions of who, where, when, what’s the problem, what happened, and what’s the solution. These questions draw students’ attention to important points of the story. Familiarity with story mapping can allow for better recall and sequence of text. This strategy was found to be effective for students in primary grades (Baumannn & Bergeron, 1993).
Another popular postreading strategy is questioning. Certain types of questioning strategies have been shown to increase comprehension and cognition (Davey & McBride, 1986; Liang, Watkins, Graces & Hosp, 2010). Questioning has been shown to simultaneously help students with literal and inferential understandings (Davey & McBride, 1986). Liang et al. (2010) note that having students ask or answer questions is more effective than giving a review statement because questioning involves evaluation and application of knowledge. This finding is consistent with Atay and Durt’s (2006) assertion that interactive postreading activities are more effective than those that do not require new thinking on the part of the student. Similarly, Davey and McBride (1986) found that questioning is more effective than rereading a text, which further supports the claims made by Liang et al. (2010) and Atay and Durt (2006). Davey and McBride (1986) found that generating questions allows for increased comprehension, more thorough processing of text, higher recall, and was more effective than answering premade questions. Wixon (1983) supports this claim and cautions against premade questions because they can promote a certain way of thinking about and constructing knowledge from a text. Baumannn and Bergeron (1993) add that any postreading task can influence students’ understanding of text, not just questioning. Additionally, the type of questions, such as literal or inferential, can affect understanding, and hint at what is important (Wixon, 1983). Badly formed questions can actually hinder comprehension, or draw attention to parts of the story that are unrelated to instruction (Liang, Watkins, Graces, & Hosp, 2010). All postreading strategies must be chosen and executed with care in order to support student learning and comprehension.

There are many advantages to using postreading strategies. Postreading activities have been shown to improve comprehension of text, especially when an interactive postreading activity was used (Davey & McBride, 1986; Morrow, 1985; Baumannn & Bergeron, 1993; Atay
While some postreading activities were more effective than others, engaging students in any postreading task was more beneficial for learning than skipping the postreading task altogether (Morrow, 1985). Students who were engaged in postreading activities engaged in more thorough processing of text, allowing them to use higher order thinking skills to comprehend (Davey & McBride, 1986). Postreading activities have also been shown to help children organize, reorganize, and integrate information, as well as synthesize and expand their schema in order to discuss and analyze aspects of the text (Liang, Watkins, Graces, & Hosp). According to studies done by Gill (2008) and Morrow (1986), children who completed postreading activities requiring higher order thinking skills performed better on comprehension questions than those who did not. Wixon (1983) found that after-reading activities supported both intentional learning, or material that had been taught, as well as incidental learning, or things that have been acquired by students. Additionally, postreading activities have been shown to promote inference skills (Davey & McBride, 1986). Postreading activities can even increase vocabulary acquisition under certain conditions (Ahmadi, 2005). Providing after-reading activities can help normally stigmatized groups, such as students with disabilities, perform at the same level as their non-disabled peers when provided with instruction that matches their needs (Robertson & Hainzinger, 2006). Therefore, postreading activities are vital to the comprehension and success of all students.

**Oral Language and Reading Development**

Oral language and socialization are important parts of how young children learn (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). The early grades promote oral language and socialization between students, and proficiency improves throughout the years a child is in school (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). Oral language is often seen as one of many intelligences, or as an area of
strength in specific children (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaugency, 2010). However, oral language is an important part of reading development (Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaugency, 2010). Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus (1991) note that there is a relationship between oral language and reading proficiency. Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaughency (2010) add that “oral language is a key driver in the development of reading skills” (p. 627). In addition to contributing to the development of reading skills, oral language abilities can accurately predict future reading and academic success (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus & Heathington, 1988; Stadler & Cuming, 2010; Spencer & Slocum, 2010).

Since “early narrative abilities predict later academic performance” (Spencer & Slocum, 2010, p. 179), it is important to foster language development with activities in the classroom that use and build upon students’ oral language (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus & Heathington, 1988). Oral language and vocabulary are important components of comprehension (Cohen, Krustedt, & May, 2009).

One way to foster oral language in the classroom is to use activities that promote narration. Spencer & Slocum (2010) define narration as “orally presenting causally related events or an experience in temporal order” (p. 179). Narration is often referred to as storytelling as well. Using narratives gives “an authentic context for learning” because children hear and tell narratives in many aspects of their lives (Stadler & Cuming, 2010, p. 171). Narratives also can help increase vocabulary and phonemic awareness, two areas that are essential for literacy acquisition (Robertson & Hainzinger, 2006). Narrative language is different from conversational language because it requires a discourse rich in vocabulary, as well as complex sentence structure (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). In this way, it serves to support oral language development. In addition to promoting oral language, narratives can also support literacy development, concept
formation, and “cultural understanding” (Stadler & Cuming, 2010, p. 169). Narratives also help children build their storytelling skills, in which they connect language, structure, vocabulary, and comprehension, which are all important areas of literacy (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). Stadler and Cuming (2010) also distinguish between two types of narratives; narratives may be original narratives or retold narratives. Original narratives are stories that children invent, while retold narratives are stories that children have heard or read and are retelling. A literacy experience like narration can help children increase comprehension, oral language, and story structure (Morrow, 1985). Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaugency (2010) add that oral language development can be correlated with fluency as well. Overall, using narration in a classroom can be effective in increasing students’ oral language capabilities, which can lead to a boost in reading development (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus & Heathington, 1988; Stadler & Cuming, 2010; Spencer & Slocum, 2010). One specific narrative technique is retelling.

Retelling

This literature review has examined the many benefits of postreading activities as well as the importance of oral language skills. It will now discuss a specific strategy that artfully combines these two areas. This strategy is retelling. Retelling requires the reader to read or listen to a story, and then tell the story back to another person, usually a teacher. The reader is usually instructed to tell the story to the teacher as if he or she has never heard it before. Retelling can be used as an alternative to traditional postreading comprehension questions, and can be done in both written and oral form (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). It allows readers to actively engage with the text (Atay & Durt, 2006). Retelling lends itself well to fiction stories, especially those with typical narrative structure, void of flashbacks, change of narrator or point of view, and
manipulation of time (Kucer, 2010). A form of retelling, paraphrasing, works better with
expository texts (Ahmadi, 2005). For the purpose of this literature review, I will focus solely on
retelling a narrative.

Retelling requires the reader to utilize many literary processes such as reading, writing,
listening, speaking, summarizing, and interpreting, among others. (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson,
2010; Stadler & Cuming, 2010; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, &
Heathington, 1988; Ahmadi, 2005; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Robertson, Dow, &
Hainzinger, 2006). First, the reader must read or listen to a story, using appropriate strategies for
reading or listening (Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). Then, students must
recall, interpret, organize, and summarize the story, extracting the main ideas and key terms
(John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Ahmadi, 2005). They must analyze the events, reconstruct the
story, and put events in the correct sequence (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson). Additionally, they must
infer based on their background knowledge, and tell the story in a cohesive fashion (Camel,
Lastly, they must use oral language to retell the story, incorporating story language into their
rendition (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, and Grafman (2011) define a good
retelling as a rendition of a story that includes both organized and complete story grammar. A
good retelling must include both; an organized retelling may not contain enough substance, and a
complete retelling may be out of sequence. The combination of organization and details
substantiates a successful retelling (Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, & Grafman, 2011; Cohen, Drustedt, &
May, 2009). Good retellings also incorporate some of the language used in the story, such as
similar vocabulary and phrases (Cohen, Krustedt, & May, 2009). While this literature review
focuses on narrative texts, it should be pointed out that correct sequence of events is more
important for narrative texts; the order of an expository piece may be more flexible when causality is not a factor (Kucer, 2011).

There are many reasons why teachers choose to teach and practice retellings in their classrooms. First, it has been shown that oral language can predict reading ability (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Stadler & Cuming, 2010; Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Retelling is an generally practiced as an oral language task; thus practice with oral language can increase oral language abilities, which in turn can increase reading abilities (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Reese, Suggate, Long, & Schaugency, 2010). While retelling can be done with students of all ages, retelling is developmentally appropriate for even the youngest of students who are acquiring oral language and reading simultaneously (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988). Reese, Suggate, Long, and Schaugency (2010) have shown that the quality of a retelling can predict reading achievement more accurately than any other oral language task. Additionally, retelling helps students become actively involved in instruction (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). This strategy can foster the understanding of such topics as cause and effect and sequence of events (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). Retelling can also help students better comprehend a text (Morrow, 1985; Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988). There are many reasons to use retelling instruction in a classroom.

Retelling can be used as a postreading activity or as an assessment of story comprehension (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Cohen, Krustedt, & May, 2009; Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). However, it can be problematic as an assessment because it assesses both retelling skill and comprehension at the same time (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). Children do not automatically know how to retell, even if they are familiar with reading, listening to, and telling stories. Using retelling as an assessment can only be
considered valid if children have been instructed in retelling and have had adequate practice (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). Morrow (1985) agrees, noting that retelling is a skill that needs to be taught. Instructing children in retelling has many benefits. First, instruction in retelling is essentially instruction in oral language, which has been shown to help academic performance (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Stadler & Cuming, 2010; Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Instructing children in retelling can increase oral language capabilities and thus could contribute to increased academic performance (Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Additionally, allowing children to practice retelling improves the quality of future retellings (Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Instruction has also been shown to increase recall of the story (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Ahmadi (2005) notes that rehearsing a story can be effective for vocabulary acquisition. Lastly, in a study done by Kucer (2011), experience with type or genre of text was shown to help retelling abilities. Instruction in retelling can greatly benefit students (Spencer & Slocum, 2010; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991).

Instruction in another area, story grammar, can help quality of retellings as well as story recall (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). Story grammar, also referred to as story elements, “refers to the purported regularities in the internal structure of stories that guide an individual’s comprehension and production of the logical relationships—temporal and causal—between people and events” (Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, & Grafman, 2011, p. 118). Story grammar is inherent in the happenings of daily life, especially in books and movies, but it is important to draw students’ attention to these events (Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, & Grafman, 2011). Awareness of text structure, including story elements, is just as important for comprehension as oral language and vocabulary (Cohen, Krustedt, & May, 2009). Knowledge of story elements helps retelling
accuracy and comprehension, showing that story structure, retelling, and comprehension are interrelated (Morrow, 1985). Not only does knowledge of story grammar help retellings, but retellings also further students’ understanding of story structure (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). The relationship between these areas is close and symbiotic in nature. Story elements include setting, initiating event, internal response, plan, attempt, consequence, and reaction (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). A retelling requires, at the minimum, a setting, theme, plot episodes, and resolution (Morrow, 1985). However, students who have been instructed in retellings and story structure typically include more story elements and details (Stadler & Cuming, 2010; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). This makes their retellings of higher quality, especially if elements are in the correct order (Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, & Grafman, 2011). Knowledge of story structure has also been shown to improve story interpretations (Kucer, 2011). It has been found that age may play a role in story element inclusion (Stadler & Cuming, 2010; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). Some story elements develop and are often recalled easily at younger ages, while understanding of others may take more time to develop (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). The inclusion of story elements in retellings seems to increase as children go through school, especially in grades 4-6 (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). As students have more literary experiences, their understanding of story structure strengthens, which may account for more story elements being present in the retellings of older students (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). It is important to draw students’ attention to and instruct them in story elements in order to support retelling skills.

There are a variety of retelling techniques that differ from traditional oral retelling. One retelling strategy involves using a graphic organizer. This strategy can help students organize their thoughts by having them fill in a web containing story elements (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson).
Using a graphic organizer can also help facilitate comprehension and recall of text features, as well as more comprehensive and accurate retellings (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson). Lapp et al (2010) state that using a graphic organizer can be helpful for children who struggle to organize their thoughts. Gambrell, Pfeiffer, and Wilson (1985) add that retelling can be used to integrate story parts with children’s background knowledge.

A second retelling strategy involves the use of props (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). In a study performed by Stadler, and Cuming (2010), children were allowed to use props to retell stories. While it was found that props did not affect the number of story elements included, or the length or complexity of retelling, they did help students use more descriptive words in their retellings. Props also helped children “[enhance] cognitive schema” and gave an authentic way for children to rehearse retellings (Stadler & Cuming, 2010, p. 182). Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, and Alber-Morgan (2010) noted that written and oral retellings were equally effective for recalling story elements. Retelling has been shown to be equally effective with texts read aloud or silently (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). Retellings can be done in a variety of ways, but all retellings can lead to numerous advantages for children.

Many studies have found that retellings can help improve comprehension in students (Morrow, 1985; Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). Retelling has benefits for both literal and inferential comprehension (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). Consistent with Atay and Durt (1986), Morrow (1985) found that comprehension was enhanced during activities that required children to become actively engaged in reconstructing a story, such as a retelling task. This finding is also consistent with Gambrell, Pfeiffer, and Wilson (1985), who found that retelling improves comprehension because it requires children to
reorganize information. Additionally, retelling is a more rigorous postreading activity than drawing because it requires reorganizing and restructuring information. (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985). In addition to improving comprehension, Gambrell, Koskinen, and Kapinus (1991) note that retelling can help students learn about organizing information. Students’ comprehension can also benefit from activities that call for them to talk about or rehearse what they have read (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Simpson, 1994). Students who use retelling as a strategy often score higher on comprehension assessment measures, such as questioning (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). Students who have used retelling perform particularly well on inference questions when compared to peers who have not used retelling (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). Not only does comprehension of the story improve with retelling, understanding of story structure can improve as well (Morrow, 1985).

Several studies have shown the effects of retelling on recall (Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Baumannn & Bergeron, 1993; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Morrow, 1985; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). In a study done by Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson (1985), retelling helped children recall more details about the story, as well as remember the details over a period of time. This information is consistent with Baumannn and Bergeron (1993), Gambrell, Koskinen, and Kapinus (1991), Morrow (1985), and John, Lui, and Tannock (2003). In a study by Gambrell et al. (1991), retelling was found to increase memory in fourth graders due to the higher order thinking processes involved in this strategy. Even high school students’ recall benefitted from retelling (Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). Retelling is a strategy that is beneficial to a variety of age groups.

Retelling benefits oral language as well. According to Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, and Heathington (1988), oral language improves with retelling. Consistent with this is the claim that
Retelling can increase oral language complexity (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991: Morrow, 1985). Morrow (1985) also found that retelling could help increase sentence length. Similarly, Baumann and Bergeron (1993) found that practice in retelling can lead to longer and more coherent and sequential retellings. In general, females, older students, and fluent readers tend to present longer and more complete retellings, although retelling can benefit all students equally with proper instruction (Stadler & Cuming, 2010; John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003). While fluent readers’ retellings were more complete, it should be noted that accurate, fluent reading of a text does not necessarily lead to an accurate recall (Kucer, 2008). Retelling also benefits knowledge of story structure or story elements (John, Lui, & Tannock, 2003; Morrow, 1985; Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988). This finding is important because increased knowledge of story elements can increase quality of retelling (Stadler & Cuming, 2010).

Retelling is beneficial for students of all levels of ability. First, retelling can be done with students of all reading levels (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). No matter if children are gifted or struggling readers, they are able to retell stories with comparable skill. Reading level was not found to affect a student’s ability to render an accurate retelling (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991). The implication for this finding is that retelling can be used with students of all ages and abilities. Retelling can also benefit comprehension in language-impaired students as well as their non-language-impaired peers (Merritt & Liles, 1987). While non-language-impaired students tend to outperform language-impaired students on retelling and story generation tasks, comprehension was unaffected by hearing loss (Merritt & Liles, 1987). Therefore, while students with language impairment may struggle with the task of retelling itself,
going through the process of retelling can boost comprehension. Le, Coelho, Mozeiko, and Grafman (2011) suggest a multifaceted approach to retelling with students with disabilities, especially with those with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Robertson, Dow, and Hainzinger (2006) add that while students with disabilities have the potential to perform just as well as their non-disabled peers on retelling tasks, it is important for teachers to approach the task in such a way that will foster student success with the task. Retelling can be equally effective for benefitting students of different cultures, languages, and language delay disabilities (Spencer & Slocum, 2010). Struggling readers can benefit from retellings, especially when combined with dialogue and fluency activities in a setting like readers’ theater (Cohen, Krusedt, & May, 2009). Therefore, retelling is an effective strategy for students of all abilities.

Implications

There are many significant implications of the research on postreading activities, oral language, and retelling. First, Morrow (1985) found that children who were engaged in postreading tasks, especially interactive ones, outperformed students who did not engage in postreading tasks. While interactive tasks seem to be more effective for increasing comprehension and recall, among other things, any postreading activity can be beneficial for student learning (Atay & Durt, 2006). This implication is significant for teachers who skip postreading activities.

Spencer and Slocum (2010) stated that “early narrative abilities predict later academic performance” (p. 179). Since the link between oral language and reading development is so great, the implication is that teachers should engage students in oral language activities. Activities that involve students’ oral language give students practice with oral language. This is especially powerful for students who are still developing oral language or a school discourse.
Practice with oral language, especially narrative language, can help students’ future academic performances. Teachers should also expose students to narratives and engage in storytelling with them (Morrow, 1985). Since children who were read narratives at home engaged in storytelling more often, teachers may also encourage parents to read with their children to help children develop oral narrative language.

Retelling can benefit oral language because it is often an oral language task. However, retelling has been shown to have many other benefits as described above. A strategy with so many benefits can be well worth the time it takes in the classroom. Teachers who engage in retelling with their students can reap the many benefits this strategy has to offer. Additionally, since retelling was shown to increase comprehension as well as performance on comprehension questions (Morrow, 1985), retelling may have powerful implications for testing. While current testing practices may not be the most representative of student abilities, students who are able to score higher on comprehension questions may score better on state tests. Although retelling is not designed to boost test scores, teachers looking to increase test scores or solidify students’ comprehension skills may consider retelling as a strategy for comprehension that may eventually lead to that outcome. Overall, retelling is a strategy that can benefit student learning in a variety of ways for students of all abilities.

**Method**

**Context**

This study occurred in a suburban town in upstate New York. The residents of this town are primarily white and of the upper middle class. The two students participating in this study come from households slightly below the average income level. Both students live in neighborhoods that are approximately 30 years old.
The study was performed at the homes of the participants. Both locations were quiet with few distractions. The only people present during study sessions will be the researcher and one participant.

**Participants**

There were two participants in this study. Both were female students who are in first grade at a suburban school in upstate New York. The first, Lily, was five years 11 months old. Lily lives with her mother, father, and older stepsisters at times. Both of her parents work, and she comes from a middle class household. She is an energetic, friendly, and imaginative child who enjoys school and reading. She participates in dance class, daisy girl scouts, and soccer. Lily attends school near her home. She is currently an average reader given her grade level, but has struggled in the past. She is a strong writer who sometimes lacks confidence when it comes to reading. Lily is very verbal and enjoys socializing with others.

The second participant, Megan, is six years 0 months old and also attends school near her home. Megan lives with her mother, father, and younger brother. Her father works as a pilot and her mother stays home. She comes from a middle class household. Megan is a happy and enthusiastic child who struggles a bit with reading. She is in the same first grade class as Lily, and the two girls are close friends. Megan is currently a struggling reader who is receiving resource support at school, and works with a private tutor once per week. She also struggles with fine motor skills, and tends not to persevere through challenging activities unless a lot of encouragement is provided.

**Researcher Stance**

I am currently a graduate student at a university in upstate New York near the town where the study takes place. I am working toward a Master’s Degree in Literacy. I currently
have a Bachelor’s degree in childhood and special education. I am currently certified in childhood, early childhood, and secondary English language arts education. I worked one on one with each participant separately, and knew each participant prior to the study.

During the study, I acted as an active participant observer. An active participant observer is a teacher actively involved with teaching and who can also observe the outcomes of his or her teaching (Mills, 2011). I performed the study and working directly with the participants, allowing me to observe the outcome of the activity. This stance gave me control over the study and the ability to carefully script any directions or questions I direct toward the participants.

**Method**

This study focused on three different types of retelling strategies. I read each participant a picture book and then asked her to retell the story. The following three paragraphs contain the titles and brief summaries of each book used in this study. This procedure was repeated three times, each time using a different retelling strategy. Each session was done in a one-on-one setting at the participants’ homes, and took anywhere from 15-30 minutes, depending on the activity.

The first session focused on retelling using the illustrations in the story. I first read aloud the story *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid Of Anything*, by Linda D. Williams. This book tells the story of an old woman who went walking in the woods and was followed home by spooky, enchanted clothing, out of which she made a scarecrow. I then asked the participants to retell the story using the pictures. Neither participant was able to read this book in full because it was too far about her reading level. The children were asked to tell me the story as if I have never heard it before and were allowed to use the pictures to help. They were instructed to
ignore the words, and it was clear that the child was not to read the book, but was to tell it to me using the pictures. I recorded their retelling and transcribed it for analysis.

In the second session, I read the story Chrysanthemum, by Kevin Henkes. This story was about a female mouse who gets teased by classmates for having a unique name. During this session, I read the book aloud and then asked the children to retell the story from memory. They were asked to tell me the story as if I have never heard it before, and were not allowed to use the pictures. This retelling was recorded as well, and transcribed it for analysis.

During the third session, I read aloud the story Mrs. Toggle’s Zipper, by Robin Pulver. The children listened to the story, and then were asked to illustrate their own story of Mrs. Toggle’s Zipper. I provided the children with a small, blank book. They illustrated each page with a different story event. When they finished illustrating the story events, they were instructed to flip through her book and tell me the story of Mrs. Toggle’s Zipper.

Throughout these sessions, I observed the children’s behavior and response to these activities. I examined their level of comfort with the task, perceived confidence, and overall behavior during the session. I also asked each participant which retelling style they enjoyed most as well as which retelling they think was their best.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

Mills (2011) defines credibility as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). In order to ensure credibility in this study, I used strategies such as triangulation, collection of work samples and recordings. Triangulation, or collecting data using a variety of methods, will occur when I observe the participants, take work samples or
recordings, and interview the participants. I also practiced prolonged participation by conducting three separate sessions, and by working with participants with whom I am familiar.

I also made certain transferability during this study. Mills (2011) defines transferability as “the researcher’s belief that everything is context-bound” (p. 105). I recognize that my findings may not transfer to all other contexts. Therefore, I have kept detailed notes related to the context of the study. These notes allowed me to determine how the results of my study fit with the context as well as determine if findings will hold up with change of location or participants.

To ensure dependability, or stability of data, I used triangulation to make sure that a limitation of one method of data collection was supported by another method (Mills, 2011). Additionally, I had a critical colleague examine my data collection using descriptions, notes, and artifacts.

Lastly, I ensured conformability in my research. Conformability is “the neutrality of objectivity of the data collected” (Mills, 2011, p. 205). To ensure conformability, I practiced triangulation, as described above. Additionally, I was reflexive and transparent, revealing biases and assumptions about the research question and the events of the research. Doing so made the data objective.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants**

In order to gain informed consent for this study, I needed to get consent from parents and assent from students. Parents were informed of the details of the study and signed a consent form, and participants were asked if they were willing to help with the project. All names and identifying marks on work were removed and participants will be given pseudonyms. Identities of participants were kept confidential.
Data Collection

Data collection in this study was three-fold. One method I used was voice recording. All retellings and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then deleted to ensure confidentiality. The recordings and transcriptions allowed me to analyze the retelling, looking for inclusion of story elements, sequence, expression, and accuracy, among other items. I also interviewed students about which method of retelling they liked best and which retelling they thought was their best. Thirdly, I observed students during the retelling sessions. During observations, I took field notes, noting behaviors, emotions, confidence, anxiety, and level of comfort with the task. I also collected artifacts, specifically the small book with original drawings designed to aid in retelling. All other artifacts were transcriptions of retellings. Using these methods of data collection helped ensure triangulation and the integrity of the study.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, in the form of observation notes and voice recordings, I started to analyze the data. First, I typed up my field notes and transcribed all recorded retellings and interviews. I read through the data multiple times and coded the data in order to discern themes that spanned all three forms of data. Codes that were assigned to the data included: memory, prompts, directions, frustration, avoidance, pauses, uncertainty, and rewording. The code for memory, M, was given after the participant said that she could not remember any more of the story, such as “I don’t remember,” or “I forgot.” Prompts, P, included questions asked for the purpose of continuing the retelling. Prompts were typically given after lapses in memory or pauses, and usually consisted of a phrase such as “and then what happened?” or “what happened next?” Prompts rarely gave away any information about the story; one prompt of this kind was given to each participant during the study, and only in the case where the retelling had stopped
and a nondescript prompt did not have the desired effect. Prompts were not questions about the text, but questions that helped the participants continue a retelling without hinting at information. Directions that I gave to the students about the task, or clarifying the task, were coded as D. The code F for frustration was given after any statement made by the participant that occurred in a raised and exasperated tone of voice. Avoidance, A, was coded when the participant made a statement that hinted that she was trying to end the task before the finish. For example, statements such as, “I don’t know the story,” or saying “the end,” in the middle of the retelling. Avoidance was often assigned to statements that had another code, such as memory or pauses because avoidance is somewhat subjective. It is impossible to determine intent of each statement, but based on my knowledge of the participants as well as observations and interviews, it can be inferred. Pauses were coded as P whenever there was a pause in the retelling of more than two seconds. Uncertainty, or T, was coded when the participant seemed unsure, perhaps using a timid tone of voice, or saying things such as “I’ll try.” Like avoidance, uncertainty often occurred in conjunction with another code such as pauses or avoidance, and using observations and knowledge of participants helped me determine if uncertainty was at play during the session.

The last code, rewording, R, was given when the participant stopped and changed the course of a sentence, or used two sentences of identical meaning in a row.

As this study is concerned with quality of retellings, I created a rubric to help me judge the quality of each retelling I recorded. The rubric is made of seven sections. Each section is scored one through four, with a total of 32 points. The seven sections are: characters, setting, beginning (problem), middle (rising action), end (solution), sequence, accuracy, and oral language. Participants were not told about the rubric, nor were they taught about retelling or coached in any way. If a participant included names and descriptions of major characters, she
would score four in that section. To do the same for setting, the participant would have to include and describe all settings in the retelling. The next three sections, beginning (problem), middle (rising action), and end (solution) are so named because while each pair of words are somewhat synonymous, the structure of a story may lend itself to one set of words rather than another. For example, a story with a strong conflict may follow a problem, rising action, solution story line, while another story may be more easily thought of as beginning, middle, and end. The beginning must include all parts of the beginning of the story and include the problem if applicable. The middle of the retelling must include and describe events in the middle of the story. The end must describe and include all parts of the story as well as a solution if applicable. Additionally, all story events must be in sequence. The sequence category in this rubric only takes into account story events that were mentioned; there was no penalty for leaving out parts of the story as long as the events mentioned followed the sequence of the text. The accuracy section of the rubric is concerned with retelling using only accurate information. Additionally, to score a four in the accuracy section, the participant must have included all story events. The last section, oral language, is the most subjective category. This section is concerned with the language used by the participant during the retelling. To score a four in this section, the participant must have used complex sentences and vocabulary, using language that sounds like printed text rather than conversational language. The participant must use expression and different voices during the retelling, and must speak fluently, requiring no prompts from the researcher.

Using this rubric, I scored each retelling separately, and then recorded the results in a chart. Additionally, I looked at each retelling and found the number of words and sentences in each retelling. I was then able to find out the average number of words per sentence used in each
**Retelling Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characters</strong></td>
<td>Includes, names, and describes all major characters</td>
<td>Included and named major characters</td>
<td>Included most characters but did not name them all</td>
<td>Included no or only a few characters and did not name them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Describes all settings</td>
<td>Includes all settings</td>
<td>Includes some settings</td>
<td>Includes no setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning (problem)</strong></td>
<td>Includes and describes the all parts of the beginning of the story and includes the problem</td>
<td>Includes the beginning of the story and includes the problem</td>
<td>Includes parts of the beginning of the story.</td>
<td>No beginning or problem included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle (rising action)</strong></td>
<td>Includes and describes all middle story events</td>
<td>Includes most middle story events</td>
<td>Includes some middle story events</td>
<td>No middle or rising action included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End (solution)</strong></td>
<td>Includes and describes all parts of the ending of the story and includes the solution</td>
<td>Includes the ending of the story and includes the solution</td>
<td>Includes parts of the ending of the story.</td>
<td>No end or solution included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequence</strong></td>
<td>All story events mentioned are in the correct order</td>
<td>Most story events mentioned are in the correct order</td>
<td>Some story events mentioned are in the correct order</td>
<td>Hardly any story events mentioned are in the correct order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>Retells using accurate information. All events are recalled.</td>
<td>Retells using mostly accurate information. Most of the events are recalled</td>
<td>Retells using some accurate information. Some events are recalled</td>
<td>Retells using hardly any accurate information. Few events are recalled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral Language</strong></td>
<td>Uses complex sentences and vocabulary. Uses phrases from the book. Retells with expression. Retelling is fluent and does not require prompting</td>
<td>Uses complete sentences that mirror book language. Retells with some expression. Retelling is somewhat fluent, but may require occasional prompting</td>
<td>Uses short sentences with unvaried structure or vocabulary. Retelling is somewhat fluent but requires frequent prompting.</td>
<td>Uses simple sentences or incomplete sentences. Retelling is not fluent and requires constant prompting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
retelling. Analyzing the data in these ways helped me find clear themes that emerged during each session. These themes help give light to factors that affect the quality of retelling. The three themes that emerged were confidence in the first task, memory in the second task, and cognitive demand in the third task.

**Findings and Discussion**

This research project originally asked how different methods of retelling affect the quality of the retelling. After looking at the data, it was clear that while different retelling tasks did seem to affect the quality of retelling, there were other factors that could be playing a part in retelling quality as well. The three themes that emerged were memory, confidence, and retelling skill.

During each retelling session, I read the participant a book and then asked her to then tell me the story as if I had never heard the story before. After the first story, the participant was able to look at the pictures to tell the story. After the second story, the participant was asked to retell using memory alone. After the third story, the participant was able to draw her own pictures in a small book and then retell using those pictures.

Table 1

*Summary of Retelling Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lily</th>
<th>Megan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retelling 1 Score</td>
<td>30/32</td>
<td>20/32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>370 words</td>
<td>92 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 sentences</td>
<td>17 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~12 words/sentence</td>
<td>~5 words/sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling 2 Score</td>
<td>20/32</td>
<td>19/32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>202 words</td>
<td>104 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17 sentences</td>
<td>20 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~12 words/sentence</td>
<td>~5 words/sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling 3 Score</td>
<td>19/32</td>
<td>15/32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74 words</td>
<td>37 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 sentences</td>
<td>6 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~19 words/sentence</td>
<td>~6 words/sentence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Retelling 1

When asked to retell the first time, Lily initially seemed unsure, but with encouragement
she began to retell the story of The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything with ease.
She captured the whole story and used the book during her retelling. It was evident that Lily was
looking at the pictures. As Lily retold this story, her words closely matched the words in the
story. She told all parts of the story in sequence, and told an appropriate amount of the story for
each page. While this book was too hard for Lily to read independently, she did attempt to read
the last page. Lily’s retelling consisted of 370 words and included 31 sentences. She used
approximately 12 words per sentence. Lily paused three times, and reworded her sentences eight
times. She did not need to be prompted to continue. When scored on the retelling rubric used in
this study, Lily’s retelling of this story earned 30 out of a possible 32 points. According to the
rubric, this was Lily’s most successful retelling. Additionally, it is the one that she reported
liking the best. Lily liked “looking at the pictures…because…[she] got to look at [the book]
and…could …remember better and [she] could tell [me] [the story] better” (Interview, October
17, 2011). When asked, Lily also felt she did the best on this retelling.

During this retelling, it was evident that Lily was confident. After being encouraged in
the beginning of the task, the proceeded without prompts or lapses in memory. Lily was looking
at the pictures to help her retell. The illustrations in the story seemed to give her confidence as
well as clues about what happened next in the story. Lily is a student who tends to lack
confidence in herself as a learner; thus being allowed to look at the pictures enabled to tell the
story independently. As noted above, Lily reported liking this method best of the three for two
reasons: she could look at the pictures and she could tell the story best. Lily’s perception of
which retelling she liked seemed to be tied to her performance in each of the tasks. Her confidence as well as the visual cues seemed to help her retell in this case. The combination of confidence and visual cues allowed Lily to produce a high quality retelling.

When asked, Lily said she both enjoyed and thought she retold best the first story. She said that “looking at the pictures” helped her remember the story best. When asked why, she replied “Because...I got o look at it and then I could...remember better and I could tell you it better.” Based on observations of Lily as well as having worked with her before, I can say with confidence that she is a visual learner. It is not surprising that she uses visual cues to remember story events, and did best when she was allowed to use pictures to help her. While she showed that she could also retell a story using other retelling methods, she both preferred and performed best on the method of retelling that allowed her to use her strength. Lily did not score as highly on subsequent retellings, showing that she tended to rely on illustrations to help her retell. Therefore, visual information given to students, especially visual learners, may affect quality of retelling as well.

When Megan was asked to retell the story of *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything*, she seemed confused, as well as frustrated. While she seemed to enjoy hearing the story, the task of retelling changed her whole demeanor. Megan was initially thrown off by the fact that she would be using the book to retell. When asked to use the pictures, she replied, “but I don’t know how to read yet.” She frequently said she could not remember what happened next, and needed quite a bit of prompting. Megan spoke in short sentences and rarely used language that mirrored the text in the story. Overall, Megan needed to be prompted 13 times, and said that she forgot what happened next five times. She paused six times and showed frustration in her tone of voice three times. Megan seemed to avoid the task 4 times, such as when she would say
“the end” in the middle of her retelling, or exclaim, “I don’t know the story!” Megan’s tone of voice hinted that she was more frustrated with the task than unsure. She did not reword any of her sentences. Overall, Megan’s retelling of this story was 92 words and 17 sentences, with approximately five words per sentence. Megan scored 20 points out of the possible 32 with this retelling. According to the rubric, this was Megan’s most successful retelling.

The number of prompts, lapses in memory, frustration, and pauses is significant for Megan because it shows that she was frustrated and perhaps trying to avoid or end the task. Having worked with Megan in other settings, I know that this behavior surfaces when Megan feels that a task is too challenging. While this task was not too challenging for Megan, it seems that she lacked the confidence to complete it.

Megan is a child whose confidence seems largely dependent on her mood and her willingness to complete a task. If a task is something she has done before, or something she perceives as fun or easy, she is more likely to complete it. Conversely, Megan becomes easily frustrated with difficult tasks, and attempts to avoid them at any cost. For example, when Megan is frustrated with a writing task, she may throw her pencil or the paper on the ground, poke holes in the paper, or scribble on the paper in an attempt to end the writing task. Megan showed this type of avoidance behavior during the first retelling task by pausing for long periods of time, repeatedly saying “I forgot.” She often spoke in a frustrated tone of voice using short sentences, and did not often elaborate on her thoughts. She also rarely spoke more than four sentences in a row. This suggests that Megan was likely not confident in her own abilities and therefore sought to end the task as soon as possible. Although Megan had the same treatment as Lily, she did not show as much confidence. While both participants scored their best on this retelling task, Lily’s
confidence seemed to help her score several points above Megan. Therefore, confidence seems to play a role in producing quality retellings.

**Retelling 2**

During the retelling of the second book, *Chrysanthemum*, Lily seemed unsure of herself. When the book was taken away from her and she was asked to retell, she seemed nervous and tried to take the book to look at it. At one point, she tipped over in her chair and temporarily lost her train of thought. She remembered less details and her speech was less fluent. She captured most of the story, but at times left out parts and did not keep events in the proper sequence. Lily needed 10 prompts during this retelling and paused twice. She reworded her sentences four times. Lily showed four instances of forgetting what happened next. Lily’s retelling of this story consisted of 202 words and 17 sentences, with approximately 12 words per sentence. This retelling scored 20 out of a possible 32 points on the rubric.

This score was significantly lower than her score on retelling one, with about half as many sentences slightly over half the words. However, her words per sentence score was approximately the same, showing that she maintained the verbal quality of her speech. She needed much more prompting to continue, and paused more than in the previous task as well. In this task, Lily seemed to have a hard time remembering what had happened and in what order. Unlike task one, Lily had no visual aids from the story to help her remember story events and sequence. When Lily’s memory faltered and she had no pictures to help her, she seemed to lose her confidence. Additionally, since she had done so well on the first task, and knew it, based on her answers to the interview questions, she seemed to know that she was not doing as well this time due to memory.
Megan was frustrated, avoidant, and disagreeable during her second retelling, *Chrysanthemum*. While her retelling was slightly longer than her first, she also needed considerably more prompts and attempted to avoid the task more. She also seemed to have a hard time remembering the events in the story. Megan said that she forgot the story events 12 times, and needed 20 prompts. She was frustrated 5 times during the retelling task, and seemed to avoid the task 10 times. She paused 3 times. When Megan paused, it was longer than five seconds, and typically was followed by a prompt. Megan’s retelling of *Chrysanthemum* was 104 words and 20 sentences long, with approximately five words per sentence. This retelling earned her 19 of the 32 points on the rubric.

While Megan scored only one point lower on this retelling, and used more words and sentences, she still seemed frustrated and spoke in short sentences. Megan’s memory seemed to influence her retelling during this task as well. However, memory is not the only factor influencing results; lack of memory for story events could also be playing a role. It is possible that Megan’s lack of memory for the story led to her frustration. Megan needed so many prompts, and said she did not remember the story so many times that it is possible that she had an ulterior motive in saying that she forgot or stopping her retelling. In school, teachers often ask questions or give prompts when they are looking for a specific answer that the student has not yet said. This same thought process might have carried over into this session. This could help explain why Megan had so many frustration and avoidance codes in her retellings as well.

In this study, the codes memory and prompts related to the subject of memory. The memory code was given when the participant said she did not remember, while a prompt was an open-ended question asked by the researcher to try to spur on the retelling when it
had come to a stop. Although this is the case, it is difficult to determine if all prompts were necessary. Once the participants realized that I would prompt them when they got stuck, they seemed to pause, stop their retelling, or say they didn’t remember the rest of the story more often. These instances were usually followed by a prompt such as, “and then what happened?” It seemed that the participants were hoping to get information by stopping, but prompts simply asked them to continue and rarely were related to the context of the story.

As prompts are related memory, or lack thereof in this task, their presence during retellings may have impacted results as well. It is interesting to note that while Lily outscored Megan by one point overall, Megan outperformed Lily in certain aspects of the rubric, such as the setting, beginning, and ending of the story. However, Megan received twice as many prompts. While the prompts did not give away any information, using questioning could have contributed to some increased memory for certain story events for Megan even though she was frustrated. Based on the number of prompts and codes for memory, as well as scores and transcriptions themselves, we can see that Lily seemed to independently remember more about the story and require less prompts. This suggests that Lily has a stronger memory for story events, and can help explain why she outscored Megan on this task.

Memory of story events starts with good listening skills, as well as having a strategy for remembering. Lily’s strategy seemed to be having pictures to help guide her, which in this case were removed from the retelling session. This accounts for some of her lack of memory. Megan tends to be a kinesthetic learner and remembers best after she has done an activity to reinforce her learning. Without an activity prior to retelling, Megan’s memory
also faltered and she could not retell independently. In general, the participants in this study had differing strengths in this task, but scored lower this time, perhaps due to memory.

**Retelling 3**

Lily seemed to enjoy the third task, which allowed her to draw pictures that corresponded with the events in the story *Mrs. Toggle’s Zipper*. Lily was relaxed during this session. While she talked as she drew, and told me what she was drawing, only the formal retelling was scored. Her retelling of this story was much shorter than her previous retelling. This time, Lily’s retelling was 74 words and four sentences, with approximately 19 words per sentence. She needed no prompts except for the ending prompt that occurred every time (a variation of “is there anything else that you can remember?”). She reworded once, never paused, and had no instances of uncertainty. This retelling earned Lily 19 of the 32 possible points.

Lily’s retelling this time was the shortest of all three, containing only 20 percent the number of words used in the first retelling. She left quit a bit of the story out, but was able to retell independently using her pictures. This reaffirms that Lily retells best when she is allowed to use something visual to aid her. However, since the aids she used were the result of her memory of the story, the aids provided limited information, and did not show all story events.

During the retelling of *Mrs. Toggle’s Zipper*, Megan seemed very relaxed and agreeable. She seemed to enjoy drawing the pictures despite a usual resistance to drawing and writing tasks due to fine motor difficulties. She required less prompting and was much more independent with her retelling. She required four prompts, did not pause, and did not seem frustrated or avoidant at all. She found this method of retelling most helpful “because [she] had the pictures to help [her], but no words” (Interview, October 26, 2011). During the retelling she did not report
forgetting any information, although her retelling was very brief and she left out many significant details. This retelling was 37 words and six sentences, with approximately six words per sentence. This was Megan’s shortest retelling as well, but it was also her most independent retelling, and sessions in which she was in the best mood. Megan tends to avoid fine motor tasks, but surprisingly enjoyed this activity.

The participants in this study were taught to retell in kindergarten, and have retold several times in the past at school, as well as the three times required during the course of this study. Gambrell, Koskinen, and Kapinus (1991) note that practice with retelling can lead to higher quality retellings. Based on this research, it would follow that the more practice with retelling, the better Lily and Megan’s retelling would be. Therefore, if only repetition were at play in this study, the last retelling should be the best. However, for both girls the first retellings were their best, while the third were their worst. This study seems to contradict the work of Gambrell, Koskinen, and Kapinus.

However, it seems that repetition was not a factor in this study due to the fact that all three retelling tasks were different. Each task required different skills and actions, and thus cognitive difficulty of tasks was also a component of this study. Tasks were organized by the cognitive demand, starting with the least demanding and ending with the most demanding. The first task, using story illustrations to retell, was the easiest of the tasks because participants had visual cues to help them with their retelling. If they forgot an event, it was likely in the picture. Additionally, the pictures gave away certain story elements, such as characters, setting, and sequence of events. The second task, retelling with no pictures, was more challenging because students did not have any visual cues and were to retell the story using memory alone. In this task, it was easier to leave out events, descriptions, characters, and settings. Events were more
easily placed out of sequence as well. The third task was the most cognitively demanding of all. Students had to listen to the story and remember the events, as they had done in the second task. However, they were then required to draw pictures and retell the story using the pictures which they drew, similar to how they had used pictures to retell in the first task. The third task essentially combined the processes of task one and task two, making it the most challenging of all.

The fact that the tasks got progressively more difficult as the study progressed could account for the retelling scores going down across all three tasks. It could also account for the fact that the length of retelling was much shorter during the last task, with both subjects speaking less than half the amount of words they had used in task two. Therefore, while repetition may help retelling quality in similar tasks, based on this data it seems that cognitive demand affects retelling quality more markedly.

The participants in this study have been using retelling in school for approximately one year. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether repetition of retelling tasks would have helped the quality of their retelling. However, the retelling task they use most often in school is most similar to the second task. In school when Lily and Megan are asked to retell, they are given no picture clues and are expected to retell using memory alone. For both Lily and Megan, their score on task two was their second best score. As noted above, this is most likely due to the fact that they were allowed to use picture cues during task one, making the scores in task two only worse in relation to task one. However, it is impossible to say if the retellings in task two were better than previous school retellings. Overall, it seems that the type of retelling task affects the quality of retelling more than familiarity with the act of retelling itself.
Overall, it seems that confidence, memory, and cognitive demand of the task all play a role in the quality of a retelling. Other factors that may be at play include visual cues and prompts. Repetition of retelling did not appear to cause higher quality retellings, although it may have come into play if methods were repeated.

**Implications**

The findings of this paper have several implications for teachers. Teachers who use retelling in their classroom should first be made aware that there are many different methods of retelling. Typically teachers use the method used in task two of this study, that is, retelling from memory alone. However, teachers can use different types of retelling if they are looking for certain results. For example, this study found that the highest quality retellings were those that allowed for the most visual cues from the story while at the same time being a relatively simple cognitive task. Teachers who are using retelling with their students for the first time may choose to let them look at the pictures to help them tell the complete story. Choosing this method for this particular purpose can show students how to retell and what makes a good retelling.

Similarly, a teacher may choose to use a different method if she is testing recall of information, comprehension, or major story events. For assessing recall of information as well as comprehension, the retelling method of task two would be most appropriate. Teachers who are interested in which events students find most important may choose a method similar to task three, in which students must pick out story events and draw them before retelling. Stadler and Cuming (2010) also described a method in which students used props, which gave them clues about characters in the story, but did not suggest any events. Children who used this method used more descriptive words while retelling (Stadler & Cuming, 2010). Teachers who would
like students to use more description in retelling may prefer to use this method for teaching or assessment.

This study used texts that were strictly fictional narrative stories. Time in the stories progressed linearly; there were no flashbacks or manipulation of time by the author. There were characters, settings, and significant story events that had to be mentioned for a quality retelling. Retelling tends to lend itself best to these types of texts. However, using different methods of retelling may help teachers adapt the strategy to meet the needs of other kinds of texts. Teachers are using nonfiction texts more frequently in the classroom in order to engage students and meet new standards. Modifying the retelling method can allow teachers to use retelling with nonfiction texts. For example, task three required students to draw pictures of story events and then retell. This method does not necessarily have to be used with a narrative text. Instead, students can draw about different topics and then retell things they remember about those topics. Adapting retelling methods can help teachers use this strategy with students even if the text used does not follow a linear, narrative structure.

The participants in this study were not taught to retell during the study because they had used retelling at school in the past. It is important for teachers to teach students how to retell, which includes teaching them about the action of retelling, as well as what aspects of the story to include. Students who are taught how to retell and have had adequate practice tend to perform better on retelling tasks (Spencer & Slocum, 2010; Morrow, 1985). While the participants’ retellings did not seem to benefit from repeated exposure to retelling tasks, this study was an isolated case, and perhaps more practice and instruction in retelling over a longer period of time may have helped the quality of their retellings. Future research could use participants of all ages
in an attempt to determine if age of students assuming more exposure to literacy tasks would play a role in retelling quality.

This study looked at the quality of retellings using different retelling methods. While it found that certain methods of retelling resulted in higher quality retellings than others. However, it did not look into the area of comprehension. Morrow (1985), Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, and Heathington (1988), John, Lui, and Tannock (2003), and Gambrell, Pfeiffer, and Wilson (1985), have all found that retellings can increase story comprehension. Future research could focus on how different methods of retelling impact comprehension. It is possible that the method of retelling that results in the highest quality retelling may not be the preferred method for assessing comprehension.

**Conclusion**

This study examined different methods of retelling and the effects of these methods on the quality of retelling. I found that the best retellings are those that result from retelling methods that provide visual cues from the story and low cognitive demand. In general, these methods allow students to look at the pictures while retelling.

My research was limited in many ways. First, I studied two six-year-old girls from the same town. Future research could look at more students of different ages across several locations. Such research would show whether my findings could be generalized to other settings and age groups. Another area of limitation was the methods used. I selected three methods of retelling, when there are many more to choose from. Choosing other methods or having students retell using more than three methods might show different results. Additionally, this study did not teach students to retell. The participants learned to retell in kindergarten, but had different
teachers. It is possible that their instruction in retelling may have affected their ability to retell a story.

Due to the limitations of this study, there are many research questions that remain unanswered. As discussed above, this study did not take story comprehension into consideration. Future research could focus on whether method of retelling affects comprehension, as measured by comprehension questions or a quiz. Additionally, this study was designed for young children who are just learning to read. Therefore, all stories were read orally and contained pictures. Future research could focus on students who retell something they have read silently. Additionally, studies could use different ages of students from a range of locations. This study could have been enhanced if I had added a comprehension component to the end of each retelling. Doing so would have given me additional data regarding not only the quality of the retelling itself, but also whether quality of retelling has any effect on comprehension of a text. As the goal of reading is comprehension, focusing on comprehension as well as retelling quality would have given more information about the effectiveness of retelling as a strategy.

Overall, this study had helped me explore the possibilities of retelling. It has highlighted the importance of postreading activities. While retelling is helpful in many situations, it is not the best choice for all texts. Therefore, using retelling is not always necessary, especially when another postreading strategy would lend itself better to the text. However, retelling is a useful and simple postreading strategy to use, and can be adapted in many ways to suit different types of texts.
References


