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The Effects of Reading Strategies in Comprehension for Elementary Age Learners

An Action Research Report

By Jennifer Blickenstaff, Ellie Hallquist and Kandi Kopel

The Effects of Reading Strategies in Comprehension for
Elementary Age Learners

By Jennifer Blickenstaff, Ellie Hallquist and Kandi Kopel

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St. Catherine University
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Advisor _____

Date _____

Abstract

Increasing reading comprehension is a vital skill to improving general reading skills. Teachers can incorporate the specific reading comprehension strategies of 5 finger retell and fluency checks. We worked with elementary aged students from average 4th grade and kindergarten classrooms and a center-based classroom for students with Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD). Data were collected to determine the effectiveness of both the 5 finger retell and fluency check strategies that were implemented during our six-week study to improve reading comprehension. Following the six week study period, data analysis indicated that student reading comprehension increased in all study groups. As a result of the findings of this Action Research Project, we will continue to implement both the 5 finger retell and fluency check strategies in our classrooms.

Every teacher ultimately has the same wish for their students; they want them to not only succeed but to excel in all areas of life. One of the ways that can facilitate this wish is to give the gift of literacy. In order to become literate, all children must increase their comprehension of what is being read to them aloud or what they are reading individually. All students learn comprehension at varying rates and need differing amounts of guidance to increase comprehension. Some students need little to no help comprehending while others struggle to attend long enough to accurately restate what they've heard or read. As teachers, we strive to help individual students increase their reading comprehension.

Many students have difficulty comprehending what they read. All schools need to have some sort of remedial reading program provided to help struggling students. Low reading skills affect both reading fluency and comprehension for elementary school students. Reading skills are foundational building blocks at this age and the earlier students with low reading skills receive interventions, the greater the interventions will impact the students' reading careers (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011). Knowing how to read words has ultimately little value if the student is unable to construct meaning from the text (Klinger, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2007). If schools are able to provide what the students need, there will be more success for everyone involved.

Cooperative learning can be an effective strategy to increase student success. Caposey and Heider (2003) conducted a research study using cooperative learning. Cooperative learning occurs when students form small groups and help one another learn a specific skill or subject area. Students learn effectively in a cooperative setting by working toward a common goal. "The more students work in cooperative groups, the

more they understand, retain, and feel better about themselves and their peers” (Caposey & Heider, 2003, p. 21). Cooperative learning is not always the easiest way for a teacher to prepare and teach. Yet, when it is used in a classroom setting, children have to take more responsibility for their learning. Research has shown that this interaction helps children learn more effectively and has proven to be successful (Caposey & Heider, 2003).

“Research shows there are several underlying causes for poor reading comprehension. Among the reasons are the complex process of learning to read, the type of instruction, method for decoding, prior knowledge, a diverse population, and development of vocabulary ” (Caposey & Heider, 2003, p. 14). Students with low literacy skills have less access to the regular curriculum, are prone to poor self-esteem, low motivation, behavioral problems, and academic underachievement. According to Neumann, Ross, & Slaboch (2001), putting an emphasis on early interventions with reading instruction so that students are capable readers by the third grade is necessary because low reading scores have been linked to weakness in phonics and phonemic awareness skills. Consequently, K-3 instruction in many schools has focused heavily on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition.

The over-emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognitions has led to a breakdown in the teaching process for students who struggle with literacy skills related to the specific skills and strategies taught versus where the learning gap frequently occurs. Research conducted by Klinger, Urbach, Golos, Brownell, & Menon (2010) displayed that teachers of students with learning disabilities across several states and classroom setting models had a tendency to focus on literacy skills related to

phonological awareness and decoding. It was noted that strategies related to increasing comprehension were rarely observed and even less frequently explicitly taught.

Struggling learners require more explicit instruction on specific comprehension strategies that can be used to obtain both surface level information and critical thinking information from text.

Increasing fluency is a key way of increasing a student's comprehension skills. Teachers can use a variety of methods to increase reading fluency. These include choral reading, echo reading, partner reading, reading along silently as oral reading is being modeled, using poetry, and reader's theatre. These methods can be used in either small groups during reading, or as an intensive intervention implemented three times a week in 20 minute intervals (Neumann, Ross, & Slaboch, 2004). Students all learn in different ways. Many need a variety of learning styles presented to them in order to succeed. The program conducted in the research study found that children have increased benefits in their learning by using auditory, visual and kinesthetic stimulations (Hausheer et al., 2011). When teachers incorporate different ways to learn, they are helping reach various students. Many students learn best one way, but others need to learn the same information through varying learning styles. This also benefits students who need increased repetition in differing ways. Another example of why teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods in order for students to succeed is that it gives students a chance to do the same thing multiple times in numerous ways. Students learn through reading, writing, speaking and listening. By the time a child is six years old, their vocabulary should include thousands of words (Caposey & Heider, 2003). If a child is

not exposed to vocabulary for various reasons, he or she may struggle right from the beginning.

Not only do teachers need to focus on fluency activities, they also need to incorporate and teach comprehension strategies. Building background knowledge and learning new vocabulary is essential to understanding the material being read. Failure to make connections and learn new words will hinder student comprehension. Students must be able to decode words routinely and with ease to be successful readers. Emerging readers may make decoding errors, and put a great deal of effort into reading words correctly. Thus, emerging readers have no additional cognitive resources to draw upon to be successful with comprehension. They may be able to read the words but fail to connect them in a way to give meaning to their oral reading (Neumann, Ross, & Slaboch, 2004).

Other aspects holding students back from comprehending literature is lack of fluency or not able to participate, in reading behaviors such as making words, identifying words in text, and writing words as they attempt to protect themselves from failure (Jordai, 2011). These are strategies teachers can incorporate in their small groups.

Comprehension is an important element during all states of literacy development. Students who read more fluently are able to focus on meaning, hold more of the information in their working memory, and incorporate their own background knowledge with what they have read. Reading with accuracy and effective speed allows the reader to focus on the meaning of the words (Neumann, Ross, & Slaboch, 2004). This again proves the importance of fluency and speed that students need to be successful at comprehension.

Most teachers do some form of guided reading or small group instruction during their literacy block. Working with smaller groups of students allows teachers to reach students where their skills are at on individual levels. When this occurs, students have more gains by getting more personalized attention and creating a bond with the instructor (Hausheer et al., 2011). This allows students to gain confidence in their abilities. “Guided reading is helpful for students who are fluent readers but lack comprehension skills. It forces them to think about what they have read” (Caposey & Heider, 2003, p. 19). Teachers who take the time to plan for their small group instruction are benefiting all students involved. When teachers work with small groups, students can master comprehension skills through the use of repetition. They hear the selection both from their own lips and others in the group, including the teacher.

From all this research, we decided to conduct a study in each of our own classrooms to discover what effect a specific reading strategy program will have on comprehension by elementary age learners. In each of the three classrooms, we collected data on a five-finger retell intervention and reading fluency checks with our students. Retelling a story demonstrates a student’s ability to identify the story’s important events and also provides a purpose for continued reading (Klinger et al., 2007).

Jennifer teaches in a low income, rural, small town school in northern Minnesota. She conducted the study in her classroom of 16 students consisting of 6 boys, 10 girls, and 2 special education students who were not a part of the study because they leave the classroom during this time.

Ellie’s kindergarten class is part of a large school district in a northern suburb of the Twin Cities. Many students in her school building qualify for Title 1 services as well

as Free and Reduced Lunch. She has 21 students, 12 girls and 9 boys. Out of those 21 students, 8 are English Language Learners coming from homes that speak Spanish, Russian, or Lao. Two students are very young and are being retained, repeating kindergarten again next fall. None of her students have been identified as special education at this point in their educational career. She collected data on all 21 students in her class.

Kandi teaches in an elementary school within a large school district that consists of a dynamic mix of student demographics. The school populations consist of a large number of students who qualify for title funding. Her classroom is a self-contained center based class for students with Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD). She has 7 students in her class with varying physical and cognitive disabilities. She collected data on 5 of her 7 students. She did not collect data on 2 of her students because they were non-verbal and the tests were not able to be appropriately and adequately adapted to their unique communication abilities.

Exploring what effect will a specific reading strategy program have on comprehension by elementary age learners is an important topic to address. In the next section, we will describe the process of this exploration.

Description of Research Process

We collected data from four main sources including pre- and post-tests, weekly fluency checks and comprehension questions, as well as collecting student work. We collected data every week for six weeks to show if and what progress the students in fourth grade, kindergarten, or a special education classroom were making.

We began our action research in April by giving our classes each a different pre-assessment according to student population and district resources to provide baseline data on each student. We taught our classes the comprehension check called the 5 finger retell (see Appendix A) that we were going to be implementing as well as the fluency check (see Appendix B) that we would also be implementing each week. The 5 finger retell consists of asking each student the following questions: *Who was in the story? Where and when does the story take place? What happened in the beginning? What was the problem in the story? How was the problem solved?* We taught our students the process for considering the questions and appropriately answering the questions listed in the 5 finger retell. We also explained to each class that we would be checking their fluency each week and be listening for expression and volume, pace, smoothness, and phrasing.

Jennifer started by having her students take a pre-assessment (see Appendix C) where students read a story and answered questions based on the story. Then she checked her students' comprehension by using a checklist (see Appendix A). Every Monday the class read the same story from the reading textbook aloud as a class. Once the story was finished, the class broke up into small groups and rotated around to different learning centers. During this time, Jennifer took her students individually to her teacher table where she completed the 5-finger retell checklist based on the story they just read as a class. She also completed the fluency checklist (see Appendix B) after the student read a passage from AIMS Web. AIMS Web is a computer program that measures how many words per minute each student reads at his or her grade level. She also collected the weekly comprehension test administered after each story in the textbook to see if there was a common area the whole class was struggling with. By collecting the extra data it

helped Jennifer pinpoint a specific strategy the whole class needed to work on and in turn help them with the 5 finger retell.

Ellie gave all 21 of her kindergartners a pre-assessment (see Appendix D) from her reading curriculum. She determined that it was age-appropriate and showed the student's comprehension abilities very clearly. It included only 4 questions to try and hold the students attention. After administering the pre-assessment, she divided her class into two groups: one group would do the 5 finger retell while the other group did fluency checks. The students who struggled were taught the 5 finger retell while students who could read to some extent were monitored on their fluency throughout the six weeks of April and May.

Kandi worked with two small groups within her center based classroom. One of the groups consisted of two third grade students and one second grade student. The first group was reading at a slightly higher Direct Reading Assessment (DRA) level than her second group. The second group consisted of three first grade students. Kandi started her first week by administering DRA baseline assessments to each of the six students and introducing the 5 finger retell to both the lower and higher level DRA groups and vocabulary associated with the strategy. Additionally, Kandi collected fluency data with the fluency checklist for students in both the lower and higher level DRA groups by using reading materials at each student's DRA level. Kandi elected to utilize both the 5 finger retell and fluency check strategies on each group due to the sample size of her study group.

Throughout the next six weeks we completed the fluency and comprehension checklists and also collected student work. Jennifer continued to meet with her students

individually at the teacher table while the rest of the students rotated around to different learning centers. She would monitor the students' progress with the 5 finger retell checklist (Appendix A) using the story we read as a class on Monday. She also had them read a fourth grade reading passage using AIMS Web and noted how many words per minute each student read. Jennifer also continued to compile the student's results on the weekly comprehension assessments that followed the reading story for the week, and noted any consistencies with the class or common struggles an individual student may have had.

Each week, Ellie met with individual students for fluency checks and small groups for the 5 finger retell. She used leveled stories appropriate for her students to read while she checked their fluency and read the students with the lower reading ability level a story while they listened and then completed the 5 finger retell with the teacher. Ellie recorded on the appropriate sheets (see Appendix A & B) each day for every student. After week one, Ellie discovered she needed to change the 5 finger retell questions from *What was the problem in the story? How was the problem solved?* to *What happened in the middle of the story? What happened at the end of the story?* These changes made it much easier for the students to follow. While Ellie was working with individuals or small groups, the rest of the class was working independently at centers in the classroom.

Weekly, Kandi collected data using both the fluency checklist and the 5 finger retell data sheet for each respective group. Kandi worked with each small group of three at the teaching table by working individually with one student at a time and meanwhile provided independent work for the remaining two students. While working individually with a student, Kandi had the student read DRA level appropriate text as indicated by the

baseline DRA assessment. Then Kandi rated fluency via the checklist and followed up by having the students identify key areas of the 5 finger retell as indicated on the data sheet. Due to the nature of the lower leveled DRA text, there were times that some of the key points listed on the 5 finger retell were irrelevant. When Kandi encountered situations where certain key points were not addressed in a specific text, Kandi would note “not applicable” on that specific section of the 5 finger retell data collection for that day.

The sixth and final week we each gave our classes a final fluency and comprehension check as well as a post assessment. Jennifer gave her class the same comprehension assessment (see Appendix C) she gave them at the start of her research to observe the growth her students made throughout the six weeks. She also gave her students a final fluency check to determine how many words per minute her students increased. Ellie used the same pre-assessment she gave in April as a post-assessment (see Appendix D) at the end of the six weeks, in May. She noted the test results in her tally sheet for the pre-assessment, fluency checks, 5 finger retell checks, and post-assessments. Kandi re-administered the DRA test, the 5 finger retell and a fluency check for each student. Kandi noted the results of each test in the student’s records.

All of our data collected helped us to explore the effect a specific reading strategy program had on comprehension by elementary age learners. In the next section we will analyze the data we collected in each of our classrooms.

Analysis of Data

Following the research process, we gathered all the data from our three classrooms. We organized and analyzed all of the data to see if we could find similarities

or patterns. We used graphs, notes, and observations to see if our action research project results were effective in helping us answer our action research question: What effect will a specific reading strategy program have on comprehension by elementary age learners? The evidence indicated the following findings for each teacher.

Jennifer completed the research project with 14 of her 16 fourth grade students. There were two students who left during this time for special education services. Each week she completed the 5 finger retell and fluency check while reading a fourth grade reading passage. She started the 6 week research project by giving her students a comprehension test which served as both her pre and post assessment. By obtaining that baseline data she had a starting point for her research. Before the interventions were put in place, the average score for her fourth graders was 77%. After the interventions were completed, her class showed an improvement and averaged 88% on the same assessment (see Figure 1). A gain of 11% proved that both interventions had an impact on the students test scores.

In Ellie's kindergarten class, she gave all 21 of her students a comprehension test from her curriculum that served as her pre and post assessment. She took 11 of her students and taught them the 5 finger retell strategy to check weekly. She took the other 10 students and did the fluency checks each week with an appropriate leveled story. Being she only saw her students twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, she was unable to conduct both the 5 finger retell and fluency check with all 21 of her students due to time restraints.

After 6 weeks, Ellie gave all 21 of her students the same comprehension assessment as her pre-assessment. When calculating the averages for the kindergartners,

before the intervention, her students had an average score of 65% on the pre-assessment. After the intervention, Ellie's kindergartners had 82% on the post-assessment (see Figure 1). With an increase of 17%, this shows that most of the students increased their comprehension skills and both interventions helped her kindergartners.

In Kandi's class she worked with six students and collected data on five of those students. She administered the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) provided by her district to function as both the pre and post assessment. She conducted weekly assessments using five finger retell and using fluency checks with the five students.

Kandi used a total of three varying types of assessment to measure growth in using specific reading strategies to increase student's reading comprehension.

The first area of data collected was via a pre-assessment with each of the five students using the DRA test. Kandi individually assessed each student within the center based classroom in a small group (two or three students) setting. Kandi recorded baseline DRA scores achieved for each student upon completion of the assessment. Each of the five students achieved between a pre-A and a two for reading levels. This indicates that all five students were functioning at varying reading levels correlating to kindergarten reading levels. At the end of the six week data collection period, Kandi re-administered the DRA test for each of the five students under the same environmental conditions and using the same DRA test kit. The results indicated overwhelming evidence of an overall increase in DRA scores. Each of the five students displayed an improvement of between one to two DRA levels. The final DRA levels fell between two and three, which also fell within kindergarten reading levels.

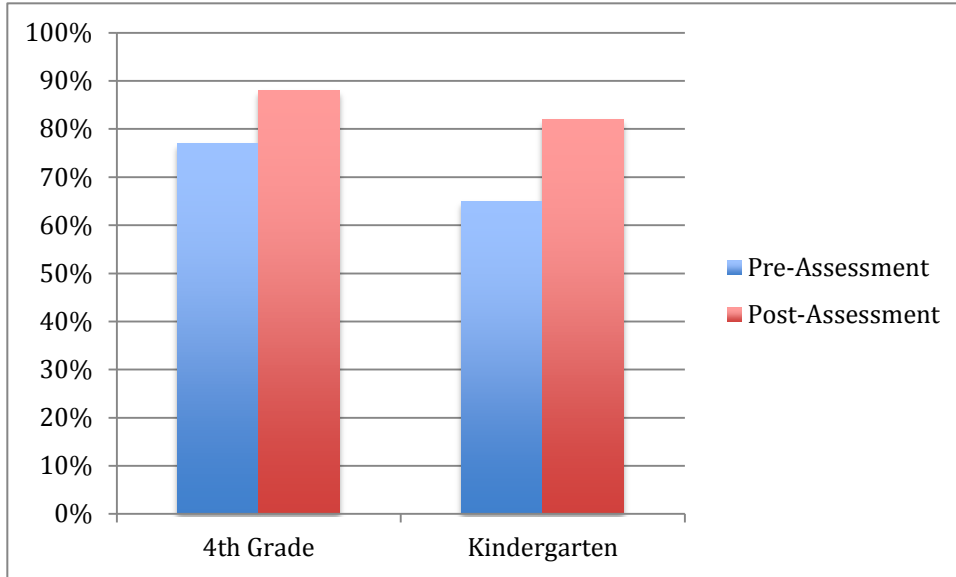


Figure 1. Average percentage of a comprehension pre and post assessment in a fourth grade and kindergarten classroom.

Table 1

Development Reading Assessment for Kandi’s Students

DRA Level	Pre Assessment	Post Assessment
Student A	A	2
Student B	2	3
Student C	2	3
Student D	pre-A	2
Student E	pre-A	2

Before beginning the intervention, Jennifer noticed her class would struggle with summarizing a story. When they were asked to summarize, many would add a few of the key areas but would add too many details. By incorporating the 5 finger retell, the students had to stay focused on the main topics and avoid adding unnecessary details.

Before incorporating the 5 finger retell, when asked to summarize a story the students had an average score of 85%. At the end of the 6 week period, the students had an average score of 95% (see Figure 2). The improvement showed that by giving the students key things to focus on when giving a summary, really helped them stay focused and to the point.

When we look a little more closely at the 11 kindergarten students in Ellie's class who did the 5 finger retell intervention for 6 weeks, we see the first time they were asked the 5 finger retell questions, on average, they had 72% correct. By the end of the 6 weeks, the 11 kindergartners have 94% correct (see Figure 2). The 5 finger retell gave the students specific things to be listening for in the story: the setting, the characters, and what happened at the beginning, middle, and end. By having these specific things to listen for, the students were able to comprehend more of the story.

Kandi collected 5 finger retell data for three of the five students. During the six week collection period, two of the five students missed between three to four of the six fluency checks due to absences from school. As a result of the absences only the three students who engaged in both the first and final fluency were included in the average scores reported. Kandi recorded the results for each student on the five finger retell data sheet (see Appendix A). For the pre-assessment, the three students displayed an average baseline 5 finger retell score of 60%. For the post assessment, they displayed an average

final 5 finger retell score of 73%. This indicates a 13% increase during the six week data collection period.

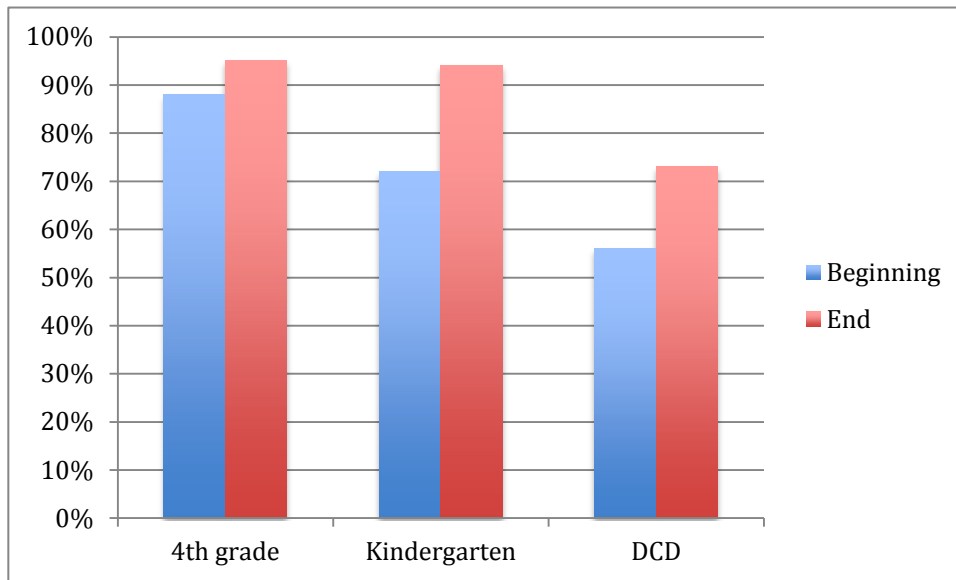


Figure 2. Average percentage of a 5 finger intervention in a fourth grade, kindergarten, and DCD classroom.

Each week Jennifer conducted a fluency check using the checklist while the students were reading an AIMS Web passage. AIMS Web is a web based program used by her school to monitor the growth students make in their reading rate while reading a grade level passage. Students get one minute to read as much of the text as they can and then the teachers calculate how many words per minute each student reads. By the fourth grade level, students have a pretty good grasp of the areas listed on the checklist so she was mainly focusing in on their words per minute. The graph visually reveals that the students average fluency rating was 82% at the beginning and 93% at the end of the intervention (see Figure 3). This indicated an 11% increase in student fluency. Also, the students average words per minute increased. Beginning the study, the students were

reading an average of 146 words per minute, and by the end of the study the fourth graders were reading an average of 157 words per minute.

When looking at the 10 kindergarten students in Ellie's class who did the weekly fluency checks, the first time they were asked to read level appropriate stories, they were able to fluently read only 60% of the time. After practice and working with the teacher, students were able to read at a 94% fluency rate at the end of 6 weeks (see Figure 3). This displayed a 34% increase in reading fluency. Throughout the six week period, Ellie helped students focus on their expression and volume, pace, smoothness and phrasing. All of these skills are very important in kindergarten as students begin to read. Also, she taught the students vocabulary words and how to use them in their read alouds and their importance for their reading futures. Ellie not only explained that she was watching for these four fluency skills, but also demonstrated them anytime the students would hear a story read to them.

Kandi collected weekly fluency check data for three of the five students. During the six week data collection period, two of the five students missed between three to four of the six fluency checks due to absences from school. As a result of the absences only the three students who engaged in both the first and final fluency were included in the average scores reported. Kandi recorded the results for each student on the fluency check data sheet (see Appendix B). For the pre assessment, the three students displayed an average baseline fluency check score of 69%. For the post assessment, they displayed an average final fluency check score of 81%. This indicated a 12% increase in student reading fluency.

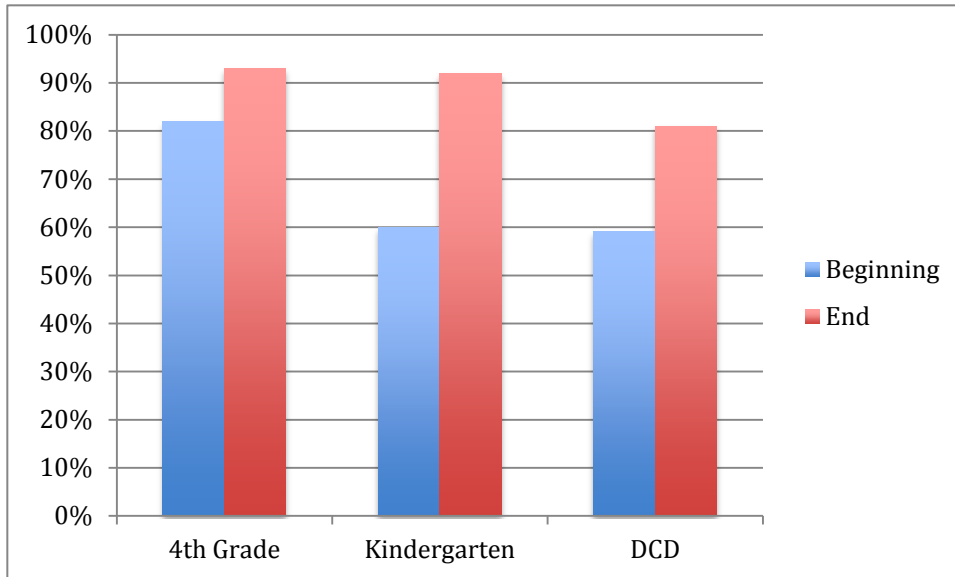


Figure 3. Average percentage of a fluency intervention in a fourth grade, kindergarten, and DCD classroom.

In conclusion, it is very encouraging to see that both interventions helped student comprehension skills increase in all three classroom settings. Students who were given the 5 finger retell intervention, fluency intervention, or both interventions at the same time were all able to increase their comprehension rates when listening or reading stories.

These results left us with questions and thoughts about how to improve our interventions and incorporate them into our regular reading lesson times. In the next section we will detail our action plan of the next steps we would take with this research, and how we would alter our methods to put it into practice.

Action Plan

When the 6 week period was over, we concluded that our reading interventions were successful in improving students' reading comprehension; however, in the future we would plan some changes in the research process. The main area Jennifer would change would be the time frame. She would lengthen the study to include possibly a whole

quarter to determine what areas the students are grasping or what areas they may be struggling with. During the 6 week period, once the students were taught the interventions and had a solid feel for them, it was time for the post assessment. By extending the time frame, Jennifer would also change how often the fluency checklist and 5 finger retell checklist would be completed. She would change the schedule from weekly to biweekly since there are not usually huge gains or drops over the course of a week.

Another area Jennifer would change would be the pre and post assessment. If this study were conducted in the fall, several items on the pre assessment would need to be revised since this information had not yet been taught in the fourth grade curriculum. She would find a beginning of fourth grade comprehension test that only focused on the story and left out dictionary usage or multiple meaning words. Once the study was conducted, she would then give them this same assessment to measure their growth, and to determine if the 5 finger retell intervention was a success.

One main thing in Ellie's research was her short amount of time with students. She wished she had her kids more often and had time to do both interventions with all of her students. She is excited to know that in the future she will only have one classroom all five days of the week and be able to teach all of her students both interventions to use as skills in their futures.

Another struggle Ellie had with time was working with students in between assessments. She would meet with an individual or small group and do the weekly fluency checks and 5 finger retell, and then they would be gone for the week. In the future she will work on the specific skills of fluency: expression and volume, pace,

smoothness, and phrasing. She was unable to focus on these skills with individual students. She needed more time to review the 5 finger retell points: setting, characters, beginning, middle, and end. She taught the groups this strategy and would review each week but never had enough time to elaborate on any of those areas. After reviewing the pre and post assessment Ellie used in her kindergarten classroom, she decided that she would use the assessment again at the beginning of the year but would prefer to find a longer one for the end of the school year. It needs to be short for the kindergarteners attention span, but it would be helpful if it focused on the same 5 finger retell parts of a story. Asking the students the specific questions about who the characters are, where the story takes place, and what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of the story for the pre and post assessment would help have a better understanding of how well the 5 finger retell intervention worked.

Kandi was pleased with how she conducted the study in her classroom.

Regarding the pre and post assessment, Kandi was generally satisfied with using the DRA test as a measuring tool. However, she discovered problems in its overall usefulness when used in a classroom with a highly diverse population. The DRA test is the preferred tool of her district to measure overall reading abilities for students of average ability levels from grades K-3. There is another test created by the same developer for grades 4-8. The DRA test that Kandi used with her students scores reading levels from pre A-40. Despite the fact that Kandi's students included in the study ranged from grades 1-3, all of her students achieved both pre and post assessment scores in the average kindergarten reading range. Additionally, one of her 3rd grade students was unable to have results recorded and included in the study due to severe communication

disabilities (non-verbal, eye gaze only). Kandi will continue to search for a more developmentally appropriate assessing system for the population of students she works with but will utilize the district provided DRA test until she is able to locate an appropriate substitute.

The 6 week timeline of the study was restrictive: Kandi would have liked to have been able to extend the time to a minimum of a full school year term. In her district, they operate on a trimester system. By expanding the duration of the time used to study the effectiveness of the two strategies on reading comprehension, her students would have been given more time to understand the strategies being taught and perhaps develop some degree of independence as they applied some of the key components of the strategies. Furthermore, it would have nicely correlated to report cards and IEP progress reports, offering additional information to be shared with students and their families on their overall progress.

As a result of her findings, Kandi plans to continue using both strategies with her students beginning in the fall and continuing throughout the school year. She plans to add an additional visual manipulative component to the 5 finger retell strategy based upon an idea that a colleague shared with her. She will create several 5 finger retell gloves for the students to wear and use as a prop when recalling each of the 5 areas involved in story retell. She will create symbols to represent each area (characters, setting, problem, events, ending) to allow the students to have a visual cue for each area needing to be recalled and adding a kinesthetic component by physically manipulating each component as they address the 5 finger retell points. Kandi believes that by continuing to use the strategies studied and the addition of a modified prop for student

use that overall reading comprehension skills will increase at a greater rate than if she did not implement the strategies named above.

Through our investigation, we found it helpful to document each student's score every week so we could look for patterns and pinpoint specific students who were struggling in the same area each week. By doing so, we could teach to each particular student the weakness they may have had so they were successful in using the 5 finger retell.

Potential ideas for future research include researching other techniques or strategies focused on enhancing student reading skills. Being able to incorporate strategies that utilize the growing access to technological resources such as iPads and tables will help increase more student comprehension and vocabulary skills. The more apps students have available to them, the more strategies they can acquire to achieve better reading skills.

It is clear from our action research project that these two specific reading interventions, a 5 finger retell and weekly fluency checks, improved students' reading comprehension skills. We are pleased with the results of this project and look forward to using these interventions with students in our future classrooms.

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Appendix A
5 Finger Re-tell Data Collection-collect data 1x/week

Student:

Date/Initials				
Characters				
Setting				
Problem				
Events				
Ending				
Score x/5 %				

Student:

Date/Initials				
Characters				
Setting				
Problem				
Events				
Ending				
Score x/5 %				

Student:

Date/Initials				
Characters				
Setting				
Problem				
Events				
Ending				
Score x/5 %				

Appendix B
Fluency Checklist

How fluently am I reading?

Date _____

Name of reader _____

Expression & Volume: Reader is reading passage with feeling, paying attention to punctuation marks. Reader is also reading loud enough for the audience to hear and with correct emotion.

1. No expression with a quiet voice.
2. Some expression with a quiet voice.
3. Some expression with an appropriate volume.
4. Appropriate expression and volume.

Pace: Reader is reading at an appropriate speed.

1. Slow and hard to follow.
2. Slow.
3. Mixture of slow and fast reading.
4. Consistent speed and easy to follow.

Smoothness: Reader is reading smoothly with little hesitation.

1. Frequent pausing, sounding out words, or repeating words.
2. Several pauses and hesitations causing the passage to sound broken.
3. Occasional breaks in reading due to difficult words.
4. Smooth reading with some breaks that are quickly corrected.

Phrasing: Reader is reading at an appropriate speed.

1. Monotone, no pauses
2. Choppy, ignores commas and end punctuation.
3. Some choppiness, pauses for breath mid-sentence.
4. Well-phrased in correct units with correct stress.

Total Score: ____/16

Appendix C
Jen Pre and Post Assessment

Read this selection. Then answer the questions that follow it.

A Change in Afternoon Plans

by Soon Yang

- 1 Lee and his two buddies burst through the door and plopped down in front of the television, ready to play video games. Just then, Lee's mother appeared from the kitchen. "Boys, I have some bad news," said Mrs. Wang. "Kim spilled her milk on the video game player. It's not working now."
- 2 "Oh, man!" the boys moaned together.
- 3 "We can't go to my house because no one's there," Kevin said. The boys also knew that going to Mike's house wasn't an option. Mike didn't have a video game player.
- 4 "Come have a snack while you think about what to do," Mrs. Wang called from the kitchen. As Lee and Kevin ate, Mike sank into a chair. He was miserable.
- 5 "What are these?" Kevin asked, pointing to some colorful tiles on the table.
- 6 "They're mah-jongg tiles," Mrs. Wang answered. "They're like a deck of playing cards."
- 7 "Why haven't we ever played?" Kevin asked Lee.
- 8 "It's just a silly old Chinese game," Lee grumbled. "My grandmother makes me play whenever she visits from China."
- 9 "What's the game called again?" Kevin asked.
- 10 "It's mah-jongg," Mrs. Wang answered. "It means 'clattering sparrow' in Chinese. When you move the tiles to shuffle them, they make a clicking sound like sparrows make."

- 11 Kevin quickly shifted the tiles around, but his awkward shuffle didn't sound like noise a bird would make. "You shuffle them, Lee, and then let's play," Kevin said.
- 12 "No," Lee said firmly. "Mah-jongg is too hard to play."
- 13 Mrs. Wang didn't like what she was hearing. "Lee, your grandmother gave you this kids' version so that you could enjoy it with your friends." She approached the table and looked at Kevin and Mike. "This set is perfect for you boys. It has English letters and numbers to help you understand the Chinese characters."
- 14 "I'm ready. Let's play," Kevin said, ignoring Lee's earlier objection.
- 15 "We can't play," Lee insisted again. "We need four players."
- 16 Kevin counted aloud as he pointed to the four people in the room. Mrs. Wang smiled, understanding Kevin's invitation. She told Lee to explain the game to his friends and to call her when they were ready to start.



- 17 Being outvoted, Lee settled into his chair and began pointing at certain tiles. "There are three types of tiles," Lee began, and 10 minutes later he was still explaining how to play.
- 18 Feeling discouraged by so many rules, Mike quickly interrupted. "You can count me out of this one," he said. "I've got to go. I just remembered that my dad needs my help today." Before Lee or Kevin could speak, Mike shot out the door like a rocket.
- 19 "Looks like we can't play after all," Lee said, relieved.
- 20 "Your sister can play," Kevin said quickly, hoping to change Lee's mind. "It's the least she can do for breaking the video game player."
- 21 Lee groaned one last time and then finished teaching Kevin the rules. Mrs. Wang and Kim took their seats. Time passed quickly as the four played several games together.
- 22 The next day at school, Kevin and Lee talked on and on during lunch about playing mah-jongg. Mike had to listen to every detail, including how Kevin and Kim were tied after winning two games each.
- 23 Interrupting, Mike said, "So let's play video games at Kevin's today, all right?"
- 24 "Can't," Kevin said excitedly. "We're playing a tiebreaker game. And I'm going to beat Kim!"
- 25 "Why do you care about that stupid game?" Mike barked.
- 26 "It's pretty fun, Mike," Kevin answered, grinning. "Especially when you're about to win."
- 27 Lee smiled slightly. He didn't want to admit that he enjoyed playing mah-jongg and was surprised that his friend liked the game so much.

28 During class that afternoon, Mike thought about the conversation from lunch. The three boys spent almost every afternoon together, and Mike didn't want to be excluded.

29 "Let's get going," Mike said after school to Lee and Kevin. "I want to be there to see Kevin crush his competition."

30 "I thought you said mah-jongg was a stupid game," Lee said.

31 Mike was quiet for a moment before replying, "Oh, I'll give it another chance."

32 The three boys then walked to Lee's house together, making plans to celebrate Kevin's victory. For Lee, an old Chinese game now felt new and exciting.

- 28 What is a problem Lee has at the beginning of the story?
- F He isn't interested in playing mah-jongg.
 - G He worries about what to do when his friends visit.
 - H He has to play mah-jongg with his grandmother.
 - J He doesn't like losing at games.
- 29 In paragraph 18, "like a rocket" means that Mike left —
- A while shouting loudly
 - B after slamming the door
 - C very quickly
 - D without complaining
- 30 How does Mike change in this story?
- F Mike wants to play video games at Kevin's house.
 - G Mike is jealous that Kevin has won two games.
 - H Mike is willing to give mah-jongg a try.
 - J Mike is upset with Kevin after school.
- 31 The reader can tell that Mrs. Wang —
- A is unsure of the meaning of the words *mah-jongg*
 - B wants Lee to share a game from his culture with others
 - C is surprised by what Kim has done
 - D wants the boys to go to another friend's house
- 32 What does the word excluded mean in paragraph 28?
- F Left out
 - G Uncovered
 - H Disturbed
 - J Talked about

- 33 The boys can't go to Kevin's house because —
- A Lee's grandmother is planning to visit
 - B Mrs. Wang's snacks are ready to eat
 - C Kevin's video game player is broken
 - D Kevin's parents aren't home
- 34 Which detail supports the conclusion that learning to play mah-jongg can be difficult?
- F The tiles are similar to a deck of playing cards.
 - G The tiles make an unusual sound.
 - H There are many rules to understand.
 - J The game is played by adults.

- 35 Read the following sentence from paragraph 8.

"It's just a silly old Chinese game," Lee grumbled.

This sentence shows that Lee wants to —

- A avoid playing the game with his friends
 - B convince his friends that the game is fun
 - C share the history of the game with his friends
 - D remind his friends that the game was a gift
- 36 The author organizes the story by —
- F describing the tiles and the rules of mah-jongg
 - G comparing playing video games with playing mah-jongg
 - H telling about what the boys experience as the events happen
 - J explaining why Kevin and Mike have different opinions

- 37 Read this dictionary entry for the word crush.

crush \ 'krʌʃ \ *verb*

1. to crowd or push 2. to hug tightly 3. to cause change by using force 4. to win easily

What is the definition of crush as used in paragraph 29?

- A Definition 1
 - B Definition 2
 - C Definition 3
 - D Definition 4
- 38 The reader can tell that Kevin is a curious person because he —
- F understands all mah-jongg's rules
 - G insists on learning a new game
 - H tells others about his experiences
 - J wants to win the tiebreaking game

- 39 One way that Lee and Mike are alike is that they both —

- A know someone living in China
- B have broken video game players
- C realize that they were wrong at first
- D want to beat Kevin at mah-jongg

- 40 Lee's grandmother gave him the mah-jongg game so that he could —

- F practice explaining the rules of the game
- G play the game with his friends
- H spend time playing the game with his sister
- J study the sounds a sparrow makes

BE SURE YOU HAVE RECORDED ALL OF YOUR ANSWERS
ON THE ANSWER DOCUMENT.



Appendix D

Ellie Pre and Post Assessment

Listening Comprehension

Identify Character

You are going to hear a story. After I read the story, I will ask you a few questions. Listen carefully. We will begin now.

Jack's Birthday

It is Jack's birthday. His party is at the park next to his house. It is a hot summer day. There is a wading pool at the park. Everyone brings bathing suits and towels. They play tag in the water. Jack floats on his back. Jack's friend Tom does a flip under the water. Then it is time for cake. Jack's father takes the cake out of its box and puts it on a picnic table. Jack's mother lights the candles. Jack makes a wish. He hopes his next birthday party is as much fun as this one. Then he blows out the candles.

Turn to the first page with a picture of an alligator on it.

Check to see that all the children are on the correct page.

Point to the picture of the apple and the letter S.

Hold up page 2, pointing to the apple for the children to see.

I will read a question. Listen to the question as I read it aloud: Where does this story take place? Look at the three pictures in this row. Choose the picture that shows the answer to the question and draw a circle around it. What is the answer?

Have a child provide the answer.

Yes, the first picture in the row shows a park. That is where Jack has his birthday party.

Check to see that each child has drawn a circle around the correct picture.

Does anyone have any questions?

Now I will read the story again. Listen carefully.

Read the story aloud again.

Now point to the picture of the star and the number 1.

Check to see that all the children are at the correct place.

Now I'm going to read another question. Listen to the question as I read it aloud: Who is the main character in this story? Now look at the three pictures in this row. Choose the picture that shows the answer to the question and draw a circle around it.

Listening Comprehension

Identify Sequence of Events;

Make and Confirm Predictions

Turn to the page with a picture of a bee on it.

Check to see that all the children are on the correct page.

Point to the picture of the tree and the number 2.

Check to see that all the children are at the correct place.

Now I'm going to read another question. Listen to the question as I read it aloud: What happens first in this story? Now look at the three pictures in this row. Choose the picture that shows the answer to the question and draw a circle around it.

Point to the picture of the fish and the number 3.

Check to see that all the children are at the correct place.

Now I'm going to read another question. Listen to the question as I read it aloud: What will happen right after Jack blows out the candles on his cake? Now look at the three pictures in this row. Choose the picture that shows the answer to the question and draw a circle around it.



Name _____

5.



1.



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Name _____

2.



3.



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