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The Effectiveness of Story Maps on Reading Comprehension

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The Effectiveness of Story Maps on Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine what effect, if any, the explicit instruction of story maps have on the reading comprehension of a read-aloud among first graders. The study consisted of 21 first graders in a small school district outside of the twin cities. The data was collected over the course of 6 weeks using pre- and post-assessments, observational teacher notes, SEESAW recorded videos and student created story maps. Results show a positive correlation between the use of story maps and students' ability to comprehend a story that is read to them. The data shows that while students still need support, their ability to retell a story using the story elements identified on a story map was greater than without the use of the graphic organizer. Comprehension is an essential reading skill as a reader. There are a variety of strategies that teachers can use to promote reading comprehension in their classrooms. Graphic organizers, such as story mapping, can provide students with a tool that focuses on story elements to aid in comprehension and retelling. Findings suggest that story maps be implemented at the beginning of the year and used throughout the reading curriculum to improve students reading comprehension.

Keywords: strategies, reading comprehension, read aloud, explicit, story map

Reading comprehension encourages student readers to engage in multiple cognitive strategies (summarizing, questioning, background knowledge, visualizing, predicting, and organizing) to comprehend and recall what they have read (Dougherty-Stahl, 2004). Miller (2002) discusses when readers slow down and think about what they are doing, readers begin to think about what is going on in their head while reading and can begin to apply strategies. Comprehension lets one go from being a passive reader to an active reader monitoring their reading by understanding aspects of a story (Cassamisse and Snyder, 2009). From elementary to college to adulthood, reading comprehension is an essential skill to obtain information and immerse oneself in an experience that brings joy.

There are many strategies and curriculums used throughout public schools in the United States that address how to teach comprehension to students, along with an emphasis on the skill within the state and Common Core standards. However, because there are so many options, knowing what strategies are most effective and engaging to students is a challenge that administrators and teachers face. Unfortunately, the solution to this challenge only creates a more significant challenge as teachers lack the time and resources to dig through all these potential strategies and options, especially without much background information or when the only background information comes from a vendor working to make a profit.

In particular with read alouds, there is an array of instructional strategies which can be explicitly taught to focus on comprehension. Self-monitoring, asking and answering questions, and identifying story elements have a significant focus in classroom settings. Still, these strategies often lack an associated hands-on organizer allowing students to, for example, restate key details of a story that enhances comprehension of the read-aloud story. Students often need

prompting and support through questioning to build on the key details regardless of reading level or ability to comprehend. Dougherty-Stahl (2004) states that teacher questioning focused around story elements and guided retellings can likely improve the listening comprehension of students. Graphic organizers, such as story maps, allow teachers to explicitly teach a direct method students can use to comprehend materials.

Davis and McPherson (1989) define story maps as a “graphic representation of all or part of the elements of a story and the relationship between them” (p.232). Using graphic representational tools provides students with a visual that helps them organize content from the story into coherent parts, creating, in a sense, a pathway through the story (Smith, 1990). Using maps to provide these paths gives students a way to organize the information they are gathering from the reading to promote a deeper understanding of what they are reading. Story maps can be used before, during, and after the reading of a story to focus the reader on the story elements. Story mapping is one strategy to teach reading comprehension explicitly.

Reading comprehension is a major focus in state and Common Core standards and requires skills that readers need to possess throughout their lifetime, yet the ability for a student to comprehend and retell a story that has been read aloud to the students is lacking through the student’s K-12 schooling. Many comprehension-focused strategies are frequently taught in the classroom, and graphic organizers are one of those strategies. The influence and extent to which the use of story maps specifically contribute to students being able to retell a story that is read to them requires more exploration. Without knowing more about how students process information from a read-aloud story and what they are focusing on in their retell, it is difficult for teachers to determine where there is a void in the reader’s connection to the text and ability to retell that

story. Therefore, the purpose of this action research study is to explore how the explicit teaching and use of story mapping as a graphic organizer, can promote higher reading comprehension of first-grade students.

Theoretical Framework

The transactional theory of reading explains that for readers to be able to understand what is read there must be a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). For this transaction to take place, however, it is important that the student interacts with the text by using cognitive thinking to draw on personal experiences. Transactional theory places emphasis on teachers showing students through modeling and gradual release, how to use what is known and what is read to build the reader's comprehension (Rosenblatt, 1978). This theory also relies on the schemata every student possesses by integrating prior knowledge to new knowledge in order to comprehend text.

In transactional reading, there are two types of reading, efferent and aesthetic, that happen in order for the reader to make sense of the text. Efferent reading is reading for information: trying to get the character, places, problem etcetera out of the story (Rosenblatt, 1978). This requires the student to pull the information out of the words. Aesthetic reading is connecting with the text on a personal level, being able to relate to the characters, their background or a problem they are having (Rosenblatt, 1978). This reaches the more emotional side of the reader. Students need to be encouraged to do both to make meaning out of what is read (Probst, 1987) During the reading process, when efferent and aesthetic readings happen together, the transaction takes place. The reader may choose the stance they find most fitting for them regardless if it seems clear based on the type of text being read (Probst, 1987).

The use of explicit instruction through read alouds and graphic organizer story maps, allows the teacher to use transactional theory in reading to help students comprehend what is being read to them by allowing students to make personal connections, visualize and make predictions to deepen their understanding of the story. Activating a student's schemata allows students to interact with and evaluate the text through the use of the story map. Throughout this study, students were provided explicit instruction modeling efferent and aesthetic reading and story mapping. Guided practice of the story maps as a graphic organizer tool provides them ways to interact with the text and make a deeper meaning out of the story.

Review of Literature

In the field of education, it was believed for some time that the focus of reading instruction should be decoding and word recognition and that in turn, comprehension would happen on its own (Lipson, 2003). Lipson (2003) goes on to state that students often believe understanding the words of a text is the primary purpose of reading. However, even readers who can identify the words of a text often struggle to comprehend what they are reading because they cannot make meaning out of what they are reading (Lipson, 2003).

When students are active participants in the comprehension strategies process, they are more likely to be able to recall and comprehend texts they are listening to or reading independently (Dougherty-Stahl, 2004). Readers become skilled readers when they develop metacognition, being aware of the strategies and processes they are using while reading and regulating and monitoring them (Cassamisse and Snyder, 2009). Liang and Dole (2006) discuss how comprehension is broken down into two parts: students understanding the context of a text, and instruction focusing on comprehension strategies that help with the understanding of the

texts. The researchers go on to explain how important explicit instruction is to teach comprehension strategies through the reading process. Liang and Dole (2006) state often the focus of instruction is only on the understanding of a text. Doing this in the absence of strategy instruction does not allow for the transfer of the skill to other texts and creates the need for teacher prompts to aid in comprehension. Instead, the teacher should focus on explicitly teaching strategies to students so they can use them on their own when they are reading a text (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996). Miller (2002) states when we take the time to really get to know ourselves as readers we are able to raise the expectations for our students as readers. In the end, we want the students to be able to take what they have learned and not just be able to recite the information back to us, but be prepared to tap into their mental resources and unpromptedly use the strategies they now have (Marcell et al., 2010). This literature review will focus on what research states about graphic organizers, specifically the use of explicitly taught story maps to influence reading comprehension.

Graphic Organizers

The use of graphic organizers has long been used as a strategy in reading and can provide students the help they need in understanding story connections through spatial representation of the information (Brunn, 2002). Graphic organizers provide students with a visual display of information which can be shown in a multitude of ways: frames, trees, semantic webs, and venn diagrams (Dye, 2000). Brunn (2002) points out that the purpose for using these spatial organizers is to show the materials in a way that will enhance comprehension. Reutzel (1985) suggests that using story maps can enhance comprehension for students by allowing them to make connections between background knowledge and story. Making

connections between events and/ or concepts and organizing this information can lead to understanding of the theme or message in the text (Reutzel, 1985). Research by Brunn (2002) indicates graphic or spatial organizers and the way teachers teach this information can influence comprehension positively. One type of graphic organizer that supports comprehension effectively is story maps. Mapping out a story, in which a graphic organizer is created to show the order of the story along with the characters and main events, is a strategy that can help students improve their oral retell and comprehension (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993).

Story Mapping

Story mapping as defined by Davis and McPherson (1989) is a “graphic representation of all or part of the elements of a story and the relationship between them” (p. 232). Story maps can provide students with a way to help organize the content of the story (Davis & McPherson, 1989). Story maps can then be used as a prompt to learners to identify and record story elements, and can then be used to support discussion and recall after the story (Boulineau, Fore, Hagan-Burke, & Burke, 2004). According to Emery (1996), story maps are a way to effectively improve comprehension because they “provide concreteness, visual memorability, attention to structural elements, and opportunities for active engagement” (Emery, 1996, p.537). When students create their own visual representation of the story, it can improve their ability to understand and retell what was read (Lapp et al., 2010). Hart (2016) discusses that explicit is clear, obvious and detailed instruction. It takes the invisible process of comprehending and makes it visible (as cited in Stebick & Dain, 2007) .

While this study focused on the defined story map by Lapp et al. (2010) which consists of a student creating a graphic on a page where the center consists of a graphic with connected

boxes around it where the story elements are identified, this is just one of the many formats available with story maps. Story elements, as defined by Foley (2000), consist of a set of common components that make up the story. These story elements are: setting (where and when the story takes place), an initiating event (this sets up the problem in the story), conflict (the focal point of the story), events (attempts made by the character to resolve the conflict in the story), characters (the important members of the story), resolution (the outcome used to resolve the conflict), and theme (the main idea of the story) (Foley, 2000). Lapp, Fisher, and Johnson (2010) discuss the process in which story maps are created. The researchers state that instruction of story maps should include modeling, guidance, and individual practice. During the modeling stage, the teacher will model their thinking out loud while completing the story map. For the guidance, teachers and students would complete a story map together to prepare them for individual practice, where students would work independently on a text (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson, 2010).

There are multiple variations of story maps that can be adapted by teachers to fit the needs of their students. Davis (1994) states that using story maps as a pre-reading tool can call the attention of the students to the elements of the story and the text organization, but also promote discussion that would help develop connections and define the purpose for reading. Research by Davis (1994) showed that when story maps were used as a pre-reading tool, there was an increase in inferential and literal comprehension. Along with adapting when the story map can be used, it can also be modified into different formats. One format that Staal (2000) suggests was to make the story map into a recognizable shape, like a face. The template that was in the shape of face, with the story elements being the eyes, mouth and nose, can help supply

context for the readers. Story map boxes can be modified to fit the teacher and student needs so that they can work to help students comprehend the story through these story elements. Smith (1990) focuses on creating story maps that have setting, plot, mood and theme within the story. Regardless of the format of the story map, these graphic organizers provide students a visual path that leads them through the story and set of circumstances in the story (Smith, 1990).

Lapp et al. (2010) states using an organized format such as story mapping can show students that text has organized formatting that with practice can be predicted. Once students become familiar with these tools, they can comprehend and retell the stories with more ease (Lapp et al., 2010). Research by Baumann and Bergeron (1993) illustrated that students can be taught to use a simplified story map to enhance their comprehension of unfamiliar stories despite their younger age. Baumann and Bergeron (1993) go on to state that story mapping is a “useful, effective technique in primary-grade teachers can add to their repertoire of comprehension instructional strategies” (p. 432).

Caccamise and Snyder (2009) state that when students use active processes such as identifying main ideas, summarizing in their own words, using graphic organizers, and metacognition or monitoring of their own comprehension, they create their meaning of the texts which deepens their learning and comprehension. When readers are engaged and actively monitoring their reading, they can make more meaning out of what they are reading.

Dougherty-Stahl (2004) discusses how if students are actively participating in cognitive strategies, that they will be more likely to recall and understand the information in more depth. When students practice the story maps they will become accustomed to using them and transfer the skill to independent reading. Eilers and Pinkley (2006) point out that group instruction is an

essential part of reading comprehension practices. Eilers and Pinkley (2006) go on to point out explicit instruction and modeling needs to be accompanied by opportunities for students to use the story maps independently to be able to develop these skills further.

Explicit Instruction of Skills

Explicit instruction is key when introducing readers to important elements in a new skill (Lipson, 2003). Stebick and Dain (2007, as cited in Hart and Stebick, 2016). discuss that explicit is clear, obvious and detailed instruction. It takes the invisible process of comprehending and makes it visible. Explicit instruction requires the teacher to use purposeful planning ahead of the lesson. Teachers must know ahead of time what they want students to know about the target strategy and where in the text the strategy can be applied (Miller, 2002).

Hart and Stebick (2016) explain that students are not able to understand and make meaning of texts without being provided that explicit instruction from teachers. Explicit instruction is instrumental in introducing students to the critical parts of a new skill and will help them to be able to identify the essential elements of the task at hand. Explicit instruction can also benefit teachers by giving them more time. Explicit instruction is often a more efficient type of instruction in the end for the teachers because it leads to gradual release and metacognition of the students (Lipson, 2003). When teachers introduce students to essential comprehension strategies through explicit instruction, it helps the students identify crucial skills or strategies they will need to use later on when they are doing independent reading (Lipson, 2003). Combining the explicit instruction of story mapping through read alouds is an effective strategy to improve comprehension. Using explicit instruction to teach story mapping can be used in conjunction with read alouds. Santoro et al. (2008) state that read alouds are an effective way to build

student comprehension through oral language activities, text-based discussion, and listening comprehension. For read alouds to be effective in reading comprehension, the teacher needs to stop at parts of the book that have been predetermined, so the students can interact with the text (Solari, Denton, & Haring, 2017). Providing students with guided retell opportunities and questioning around story elements and story structure through a read-aloud often improves students' listening comprehension (Dougherty-Stahl, 2004). Providing students support through visuals is a beneficial tool during read alouds. Santoro et al. (2008) discuss how giving students the opportunities not only to participate in the discussion but reflect on the structure of the parts of the story can promote comprehension. Being able to incorporate visuals into the read aloud, such as story maps, help with connections with text and retelling. Providing students with guided retell and questioning around story elements and structure in a read aloud, will likely improve listening comprehension (Dougherty-Stahl, 2004).

Throughout the articles reviewed for this literature review, a recurrent finding is that when teachers implement story map graphic organizers to support comprehension in early readers, students will see gains in this area. A noticeable gap in the research is how technology can become a part of this discussion. How can technology be used to improve and incorporate reading comprehension strategies as part of the visual comprehension strategy? Being able to implement some of the visuals electronically might build comprehension for those students who are auditory or visual learners and take the place of paper pencils organizers and charts. Another gap in the literature was in regards to whether the amount of time spent on comprehension instruction affected students' ability to comprehend text. This study was designed to address the

gap of integrating technology into the use of story maps to support students' reading comprehension.

Methodology

There were multiple qualitative and quantitative data tools used to conduct this research. that were used. Teacher-created pre- and post-assessments were given to students at the beginning and the end of the study to evaluate if there was any change in students' ability to comprehend a story that was read to them. Also, a story mapping graphic organizer, online tools, and classroom observations were used to gather data.

The population for this action research study included 21 first-grade students in a K-5 school, located in a small town near a large metropolitan area. In this sample, there were 11 female students and 10 male students. Of those 21 students, there were 5 ELL students and 1 Special Education student. The study was integrated into regular class time as a supplement for the district used reading curriculum. Research was conducted from the middle of December until the end of January.

The first method of collecting data for the research was pre- and post-assessments. Pre- and post-assessments were used in an interview format that featured closed questions designed to gather information on student comprehension of a story read aloud. The students were read aloud a story and then individually asked specific, teacher-created questions about the story elements of the story, focusing on initiating events, characters, setting, problem, solution, and theme. The teacher recorded the student's answers on a premade data recording sheet. For the pre- and post-assessments, points were given based on the story element answers. The score depended on the number of responses that should be given to each question. For example, the pre-assessment

story had 4 characters, so that question was worth 4 points. The post-assessment consisted of a story being read aloud followed by the students creating a story map after the story. The teacher individually asked students the pre-made questions, and the student individually answered questions about the story elements. The post-assessment was administered after the six weeks of instructional intervention were completed and followed the same format as the pre-assessment.

An additional data tool was a story mapping graphic organizer. The story mapping graphic organizer was created and provided to students to use after read alouds, during small group time and for individual use. The story map contained a circle in the middle for the title of the book, then branching off from the circle were five story elements: initiating event, characters, setting, problem, solution, and theme. Students also used an online tool, SEESAW, and EPIC, an online book app that allows students to have books read to them. They listened to a preselected story and completed a story map template along with a recording of their retell from their created story map graphic organizer. The teacher also took observational notes during whole group, small group, and independent settings, recording if students were able to identify the different story elements with or without prompting and support. After the pre-assessment was administered, explicit teaching of the story mapping graphic organizer began.

During the six weeks of instructional intervention, the reading lesson began with students being explicitly taught what a graphic organizer was and how to use the specific graphic organizer, a story map, after a read aloud. The explicit instruction included what story elements are, and what information from the story goes into each box on the story map. The teacher then read aloud a preselected story that had all the story element aspects that were represented on the story map graphic organizer. After the read-aloud was completed, the class filled out the story

map together as a whole group, discussing each story element as they went and looking back into the book. This process was repeated two times a week for two weeks, each time being completed in a whole group setting. Throughout these two weeks, students were also using the story map in a small group guided reading setting. The teacher would read a book to the small group, consisting of 5-6 students in each group. Once the story was read, the students would complete the story map.

Throughout the six-week data collection period, a written assignment story map was used at three separate points. The first was used before the teaching of the story map to give baseline data along with the pre-assessment. The students were read a story aloud and directed to fill in a story map with the story elements, without any explicit teaching of the story map or the story elements. This gave the teacher a starting point for where students were at in the use of a story map. This process was repeated again at week three and again at the end of the six-week intervention.

The observational data was collected throughout the process of story mapping and retelling in weeks three through five. The teacher would read the story and ask students to complete the story map graphic organizer template. This was done in a whole group setting, small group setting, and independently. The teacher would record notes on if the student could identify the story elements with the use of their story map and if this retell was completed with or without prompting for each story element. During whole group observation lessons, the teacher read a story aloud to the students. For the small group observation, the teacher had students complete the story map in the guided reading group independently with the book they read individually and shared out with the other members of the group when finished. The teacher

would record on the rubric the retell that was done and if the retell was completed with or without prompting. For the final independent story map and retell, the teacher read aloud a story to the class while they had the story map in front of them. During the story students, students worked on filling in each aspect of the story map. When the student was done with the story map, the teacher conferences individually with each student for them to retell the story using their story map. The teacher recorded on the observational tool by identifying if the student was able to identify the story element, as well as whether this was done with or without prompting.

During weeks 2-5, the students used the online tools, SEESAW and EPIC on classroom tablets. The students accessed a predetermined book assigned to them by the teacher using the EPIC book app. After listening to the story online, students independently completed the story map graphic organizer. Once the student completed the story map, they accessed the classroom used app SEESAW on the tablets, and took a photo of the story map they had created using EPIC. The student then retold the story, using the graphic organizer and recording their voice over the picture of the story map they took prior. When the retell was complete, the student submitted the work to the teacher via the SEESAW app. The teacher then viewed each picture and recording and scored on a pre-made rubric containing story map requirements.

At the end of week 6, the teacher administered the post-assessment. Students were read a different book from the pre-assessment read aloud. After the read-aloud is completed, students are asked to complete a story map then retell the story to the teacher independently. The teacher marked on the post-assessment sheet the answers provided by the student with a check if the predetermined answers are mentioned. The teacher determined a final score for the post-assessment.

Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine what effect, if any, explicit instruction of story maps had on the reading comprehension of first graders. To answer this question the teacher explicitly taught story maps and how to identify the story elements using the story map. Students then completed their own story maps throughout the intervention in a whole group, small group, and independent settings. The story map identified the explicitly taught story elements that were used to comprehend the read story; character, setting, problem, solution, initiating event and theme/main idea of the story.

The teacher began and ended the intervention with an assessment of the skill. While administering the test, the teacher marked students' responses with a checkmark. The teacher scored the assessments by the number of answers that were checked marked and recorded a score for each student in a row format so that each student had a score. From there the teacher assigned a score based on the number of correct answers, 0-4 = Emergent, 5-8 = Basic, and 9-12 = Proficient. Using this code, the teacher was able to put the students into a group based on emergent, basic and proficient.

For this study, the raw data for this study was in many different forms including both qualitative and quantitative data being measured. The four primary sources of data collection were comprised of pre- and post-assessments, a SEESAW recording of the story retell using a story map, teacher observations, recorded by teacher on recording log, and student created story maps with read alouds.

The teacher first gave a pre-assessment to students after a story was read aloud to them. Students were asked to then retell the story by identifying the story elements, without the use of a story map as it had not yet been explicitly taught. The teacher marked on the premade recording sheet, labeled with the predetermined answers by the teacher, the story elements that were identified and the total score. Each question was worth the number of possible answers. This exact process was repeated again at the end of the six-week intervention with a different read-aloud story and different premade post-assessment. Figure 1 shows the number of students after the pre-and post-assessment who were considered emergent, basic or proficient in their ability to retell the story that was read to them.

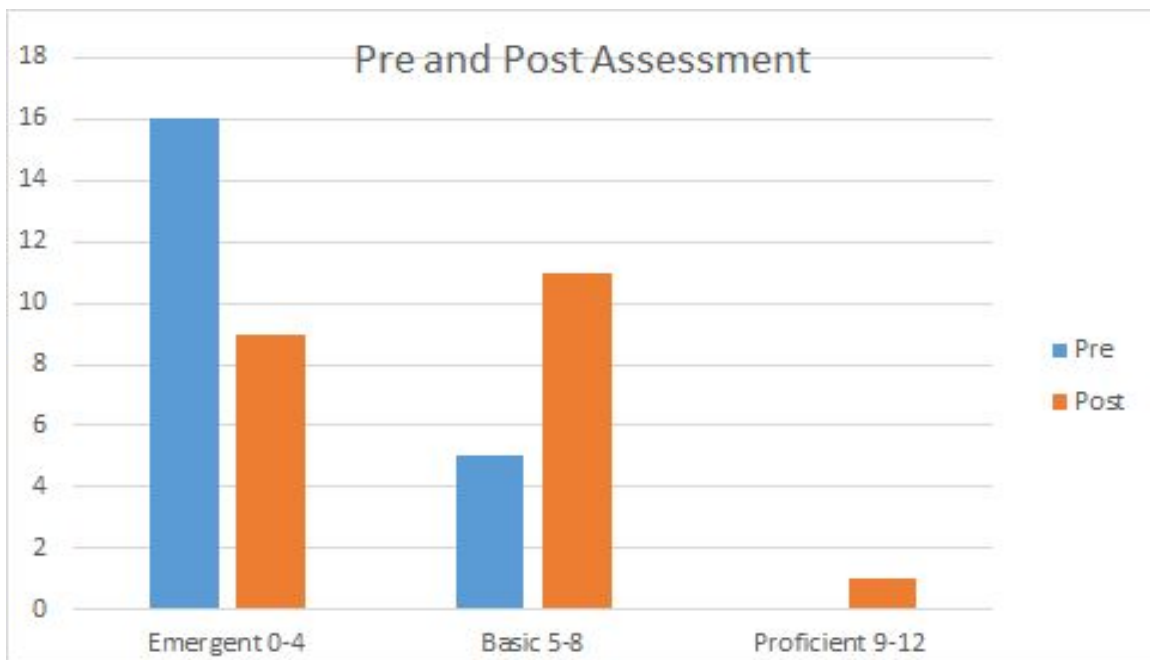


Figure 1. Classroom pre- and post-assessment results.

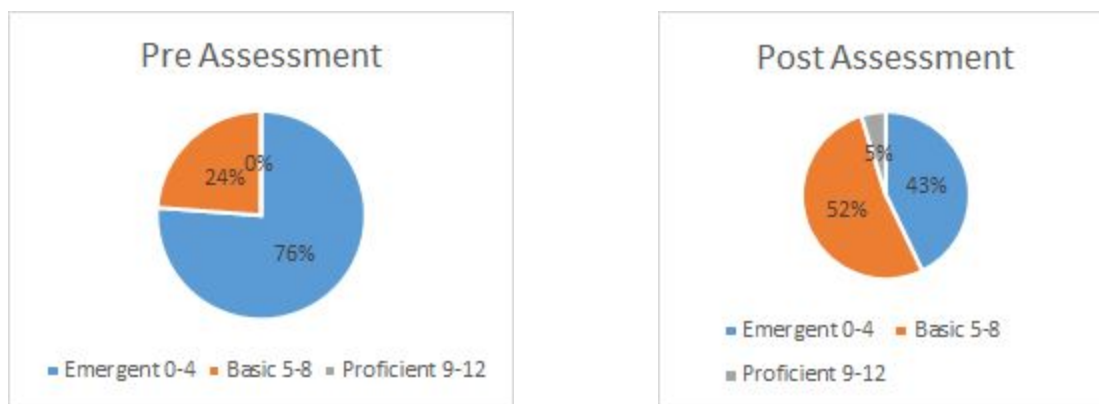


Figure 2. Classroom pre-and post-assessment result percentages.

When comparing the pre- and post-assessment, in Figure 1, there was growth in both the number of basic and proficient level comprehension from the read-aloud. Emergent decreased a total of 33%, while basic increased a total of 28%, and proficient increased a total of 5%. When looking at individual student data, all but two students had an increase in their score from the pre- to the post-assessment. At the end of the intervention, more than half of the students increased their ability to identify the characters along with the problem and solution in the story, as seen in Figure 2. While 17 of the 21 students were still unable to identify the initiating event along with the theme or main idea of the story.

In weeks three through five, the research question was addressed through teacher observations. The teacher took observational notes on students' use of story maps and comprehension of a story read aloud. This was done three times, once each in a whole group setting, small group setting and independently. Once the read-aloud was complete, students filled in their own story maps individually. The teacher recorded notes by observing or conferencing with students for the retelling of the story using their created story map. The teacher recorded the information by circling on a premade sheet if the student was able to

identify the story element and if each story element was stated with or without prompting. This information was recorded three times throughout the course of the intervention, totalled and is displayed in Table 1.

Story Element	With Prompting	Without Prompting	With Prompting	Without Prompting	With Prompting	Without Prompting
Characters	18	3	16	5	13	8
Setting	20	1	14	7	10	11
Initiating Event	21	0	20	1	18	3
Problem	19	2	10	11	12	9
Solution	17	4	10	11	10	12
Theme	17	4	13	8	10	12

Table 1. Story elements identified with and without prompting

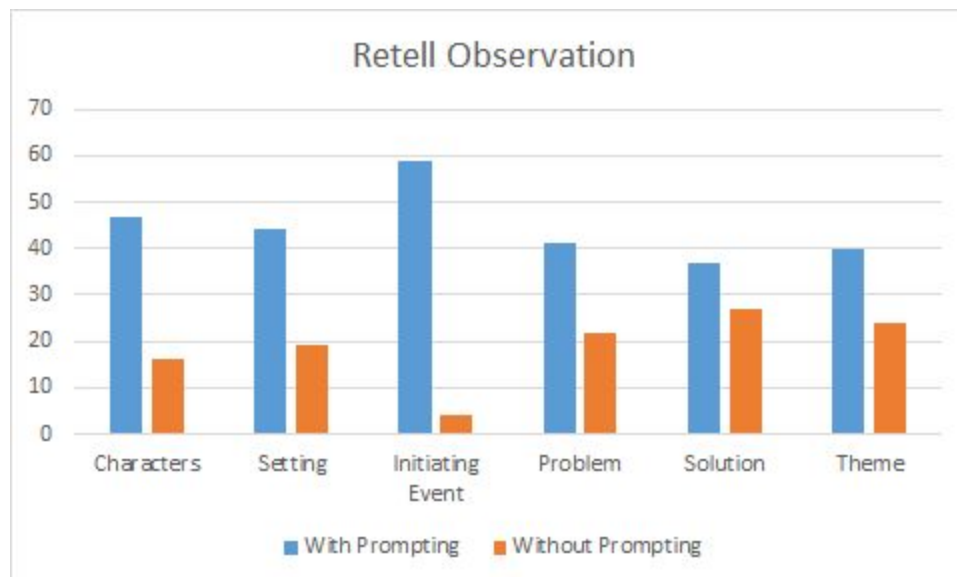


Figure 4. Observational data of story map creation and retell

Throughout the three weeks, in each story element, students needed more prompting than not when it came to identifying the story elements throughout the three-week observation. Figure 4 shows each story element and whether the student was able to identify the story element with or without prompting. The story element that needed the most support was the initiating event, compared to the story element that needed the least, the solution. When looking at the retell

ability and the setting, students were able to retell more without the prompting of the teacher in the small group setting and independent setting versus the whole group setting, which required the most prompting during the retelling of the story.

The research question was also explored through the use of the student online recording tool SEESAW and the story app EPIC, through which students created and used a story map to comprehend a story. Data gathered from SEESAW pictures of the story map and voice recording was compiled and described in a written, transcribed form, explaining what the student described through a voice recording. The completed story map and voice recording were evaluated using a rubric and recorded using the assigned number for each student. The rubrics were then sorted into groups based on the code they fit into to identify what impact, if any, the use of the story map had on the retelling of the story. To start the recorded activity, students listened to a preselected story on EPIC and created a story map independently. Students took a picture of the story map using SEESAW. Finally, the student recorded on SEESAW their retelling of the story using their created story map. The map and retell were listened to by the teacher and marked on a rubric for each story element completed on the story map and retell. The scores for both the story map and the story map retelling were then sorted by the assigned code, 1=emergent, 2=basic and 3=proficient.

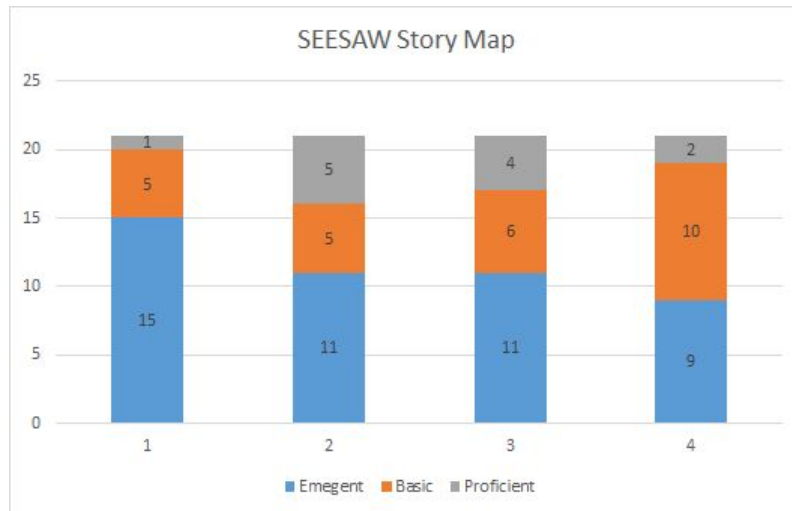


Figure 5. Three story maps created from EPIC read aloud and shared on SEESAW

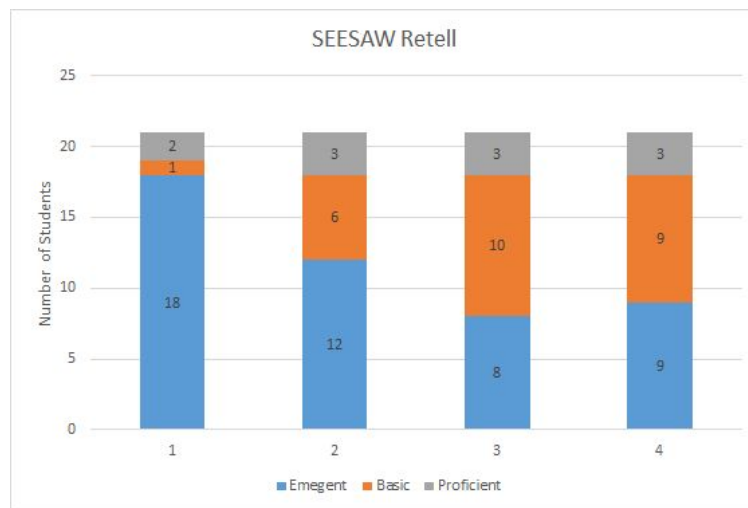


Figure 6. Three stories retell using SEESAW

For the first part of the activity, the students had to create a story map while listening to the story on EPIC. Figure 5 shows where the students scored in their ability to identify the story elements on the story map. Over the course of four weeks, the number of students who were in the emergent category decreased by five students. While the students scoring as emergent were the higher grouping initially, the numbers of emergent scores went down the most, increasing scores in the basic level. There was little difference in the number of students who were

proficient throughout the process of story maps. The number of students who were proficient started small, started to grow in the number of students and then went down for the final creation of the story map using the final story. The ability to be able to identify story elements after hearing a story increased for most students.

For the second part of the activity, students had to take a picture of the story map they created and record over the picture with their voice, retelling the story that they created the story map for. The graph created in Figure 6 shows how many students were in emergent, basic or proficient in their retelling of the story using the story map they created. Similar to the story map creation graph, Figure 5, initially the students were mostly in the emergent range when they were retelling their story. As the weeks progressed, a shift took place, and more students moved into the basic range by identifying more of the story elements. There was little to no change in the number of students who were in the proficient range for the story retell.

For further gathering of information on how well the explicit teaching of a story map graphic organizer was able to increase student reading comprehension, a written student-created story map was used three times throughout the six weeks as the tool used to see if students were able to identify story elements that are key in comprehending and retelling a story. For each story map, the teacher read a story to the students and the students completed a story map afterward. The first story map was filled in at the beginning of the six-week intervention before the explicit teaching of the story map in order to get a baseline of story element understanding and any familiarity of a story map. The second story map was completed during week three of the intervention, and the final was completed at the end of the 6 weeks before the post-assessment. The story map rubric was worth a total of 15 points. Each story element would receive a score of

3=emergent, 2= basic, or 1= proficient, based on the following scale: the emergent range with scores between 0-5, basic between 6-10, and in the proficient range with scores between 11-15. Each score was given a scale score and was recorded using the assigned number for each student. A chart was created to sort and record each story element and the ability to identify it. Rubrics were also sorted by the number of emergent, basic and proficient scores. This information was compared and graphed to identify patterns, if any.

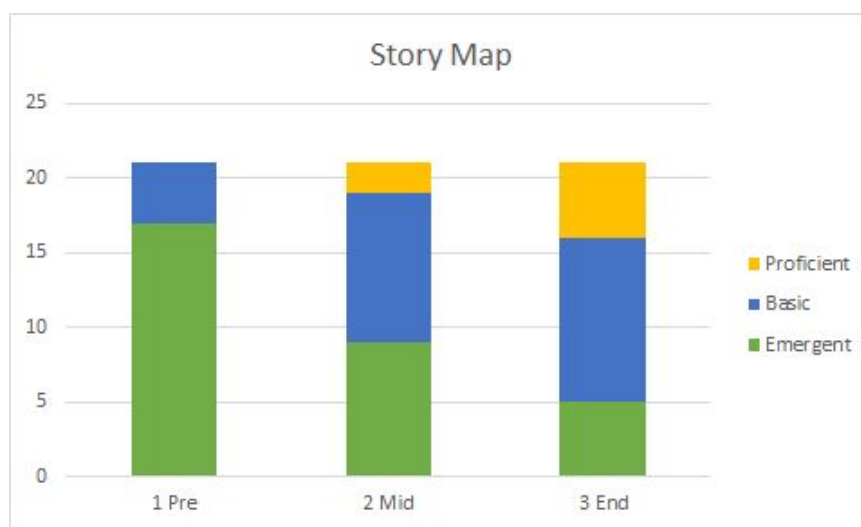


Figure 3. Use of story maps to identify story elements.

There was a shift in all three areas when looking at the creation of the story map. As seen in Figure 3, the number of students who were in the emergent category during the initial story map creation shifted into the basic or proficient range. While the students in the emergent range were the highest initial number of students in the initial stages, it was the smallest number at the end of the six weeks of research. There were no students who were considered proficient in the identification of story elements based on their initial story map, but at the end of the research, there were 5 students who had shifted from either emergent or basic into the proficient range. At the midway point, week three and the final week, the largest number of students were in the

basic range. The shift was greater from the beginning to the midway point compared to the midway point and end of the research point.

Action Plan

The purpose of this action research was to determine to what extent explicit teaching of story maps had on the reading comprehension of first graders. It was hoped that the graphic organizer, the story map, would improve students' reading comprehension and give them a tool that allowed them to understand what they were being read. Students were explicitly taught how to use a story map graphic organizer to identify story elements and aid in the retelling of that story.

As outlined above, the use of story maps after a read aloud appeared to be successful at improving students reading comprehension. At the foundational level, when students are still learning how to read and comprehend what is being read, story maps provide students with a strategy that can allow them to identify those different parts of the story to be able to understand what was read. Story maps can provide an effective strategy that can develop reading comprehension and be a valuable addition to any elementary school teacher toolbox (Davis and McPherson, 1989).

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Story maps provide students with what story elements are important to retelling a story.
- When a graphic organizer is used, students are able to retell a story more effectively than without the creation of a story map.
- Support and prompting were still important supports provided by the teacher during the retelling of the story.

- By giving students a graphic organizer to lay out the story elements, students were able to better comprehend what was read to them.

After much examination of the data, the teacher discovered the following recommendations to further the overall success in comprehending a story:

- Story maps should be explicitly taught at the beginning of the school year as a strategy students can use with books that are read to them.
- Teachers should focus on and explicitly teach story elements to the students.
- Story maps should be utilized as a strategy in whole group, small group, and independent work.
- Story maps can easily be integrated into the classroom routine and current curriculum being used.
- There should be a gradual release of responsibility with the use of story maps.
- Teachers should still provide prompting and support when needed with the use of the story map but should try to move more into the independent use of the story map.

Throughout the course of preparing for this study, implementing story maps, going through the data and analyzing it, I was provided with the opportunity to grow as an educator, understand my students and myself better, and grow my best practices in reading comprehension. I plan to use the results of this action research project to develop a deeper plan of instruction for comprehension by focusing on the process of explicit instruction and graphic organizers at the start of the school year. Read alouds are a part of every day in my classroom and this study allowed for me to learn how to take that everyday task and implement a strategy that will

increase the reading comprehension of my students, a skill that will prove to be valuable to them throughout their lives in and out of the educational setting.

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Appendix A

After reading, (Knuffle Bunny), have the student answer the following question about the title.

1. Who are the characters in the story? (4 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Trixie <input type="checkbox"/> Knuffle Bunny <input type="checkbox"/> Mom <input type="checkbox"/> Dad
2. What is the initiating event in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> Losing Knuffle Bunny
3. What is the setting of the story? (3 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Outside <input type="checkbox"/> Laundry Mat <input type="checkbox"/> Daytime
4. What is the problem in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> Trixie loses Knuffle Bunny.
5. What is the solution in the story? (2 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> They go look for Knuffle Bunny <input type="checkbox"/> Finds Knuffle Bunny in the washing machine.
6. What is the main idea/theme in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> Taking responsibility for your self and your actions.

Total:

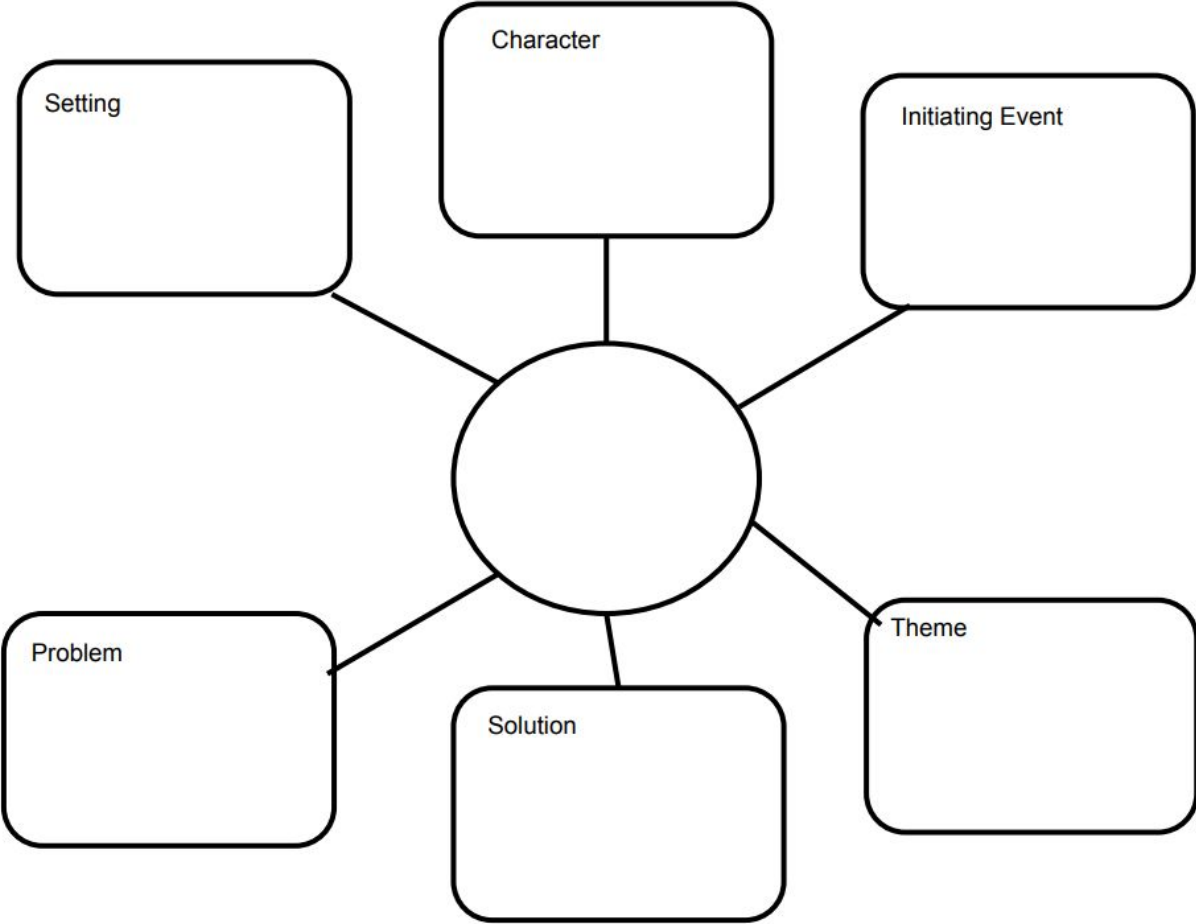
Appendix A

The Very Cranky Bear

1. Who are the characters in the story? (4 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Bear <input type="checkbox"/> Sheep <input type="checkbox"/> Zebra <input type="checkbox"/> lion
2. What is the initiating event in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> It starts raining outside and the animals go into bear's cave.
3. What is the setting of the story? (3 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Outside <input type="checkbox"/> Cave <input type="checkbox"/> Daytime
4. What is the problem in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> Bear wants to sleep.
5. What is the solution to the story? (2 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sheep gives bear his wool to make a pillow so he can sleep. <input type="checkbox"/> The animals try to help the bear.
6. What is the main idea/theme in the story? (1 point)	<input type="checkbox"/> Thinking of others

Total:

Appendix C



Appendix C

Used with a story map created independently.

Student _____

Rubric:	3	2	1
Character	Was able to identify ALL characters.	Was able to identify MOST characters.	Was able to identify NO characters.
Initiating Event	Was able to identify the initiating event.	Was able to identify some event in the story but not the initiating event.	Was not able to the initiating event.
Setting	Was able to identify where AND when.	Was able to identify where.	Was not able to identify where or when the story takes place.
Problem	Was able to identify the key problem.	Was able to identify a problem.	Was not able to identify the problem.
Solution	Was able to identify the solution to the problem in detail.	Was able to identify the solution.	Was not able to identify the solution to the problem.

Total= /15

Emergent=1-5

Basic= 6-10

Proficient= 11-15

Appendix D

Weekly students will complete the following on SEESAW on their own.

These are the directions the student will see or can listen to.

1. Read a fiction storybook on EPIC or tumblebooks. Keep the book open!
2. Fill in a text mapping sheet.
3. Click :plus:
4. Use :photo: to take a picture of your text map.
5. :check:
6. Use :mic: to share each part of your text map.
7. :check: to send to Mrs. S

Used with SEESAW story map created independently.

Student _____

Rubric:	3	2	1
Character	Was able to identify ALL characters.	Was able to identify MOST characters.	Was able to identify NO characters.
Initiating Event	Was able to identify the initiating event.	Was able to identify some event in the story but not the initiating event.	Was not able to the initiating event.
Setting	Was able to identify where AND when.	Was able to identify where.	Was not able to identify where or when the story takes place.
Problem	Was able to identify the key problem.	Was able to identify a problem.	Was not able to identify the problem.
Solution	Was able to identify the solution to the problem in detail.	Was able to identify the solution.	Was not able to identify the solution to the problem.

Appendix D

I will use the checklist for each student's retelling using their story map.

Student Name: _____ Date: _____ Week # _____

	3	2	1
Character	Characters including the main character with the use of the story map.	Characters are identified.	Characters are missing from the retelling.
Setting	Where AND when was identified in the retelling.	Where was identified in the retelling.	Where is missing from the retelling.
Initiating Event	Able to identify the initiating with detail in the retelling.	Able to identify the initiating event in the retelling.	The initiating event is missing from the retelling.
Problem	Able to give a detailed description of the problem in the retelling.	Able to identify the problem in the retelling.	The problem is missing from the retelling.
Solution	The solution is stated along with an example from the story in the retelling.	The solution is stated in the retelling.	The solution is missing from the retelling.
Theme/Main Idea	The theme/main idea is identified in the retelling along with a connection to the character.	The theme/main idea is shown in the retelling.	Retold something that is not the theme/main idea.

Total number of points _____