

Retelling

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Introduction

In kindergarten, teaching early literacy skills will help prepare students for future success in reading. Reading success, however, does not just come from the ability to decode text. It is also necessary for students to activate reading comprehension strategies to help construct meaning from the text (Gutierrez-Braojos, Rodriguiz-Fernandez, & Salmeron-Vilchez, 2014). There are a variety of strategies to help increase the retelling proficiency and reading comprehension for students in primary grades. Often times, asking students to retell a text in their own words is a daunting task. If students are unable to retell a story, this leaves the teacher wondering if the student does not recall specific details or if the learner did not comprehend the text at all; therefore, the ability to retell is important to help gauge student learning. To begin improving retelling proficiency, teachers must understand what is involved in a retelling, why it is important, strategies to improve proficiency, and ways of evaluating students' knowledge.

What Retellings Involve

Retelling is the retrieval of literary information and story elements often used as a way for educators to check for students' understanding. (Strasser & del Rio, 2013). Frequently, young students are asked to process large segments of text. The text may be included in books they are reading or stories being read to them. A lot of literary information is packed into each story children read or hear, so retelling helps teachers discover what the students are gathering from the stories (Fisher & Frey, 2009). In order to retell a story, students must identify important information from the text. In order for

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students to effectively retell a story, students must be able to apply decoding strategies, understand the text and meaning behind it, recognize sequence, infer, construct, and analyze the text (Lapp, Fisher, & Johnson, 2010).

In many comprehension assessments, clues to the answer are given in the context of the questions. By asking students to retell a story, the chance of providing context clues is eliminated. In a retelling, students must gather information and construct answers independently. The independence of this assessment allows teachers to better see what areas the students are successfully understanding and what areas the students are struggling in (Kucer, 2014).

Why It Is Important

Retellings have an important role in comprehension for primary students. Having strong comprehension is important because the purpose of reading is to understand the message of the text at all ages (Pearman, 2008). If students were reading without comprehension, they would be unable to identify the meaning or purpose of the text. Retellings are important because they help educators determine what the students understand from provided text (Kucer, 2014). Retelling is not only a way to measure students' understanding, but it can also be used as a strategy to improve comprehension. Students who practice retelling frequently have been proven to increase the number of story elements recalled (Fisher & Frey, 2009). In addition, former kindergarten teacher and current reading specialist, Heidi Hammond, suggests that exposure to comprehension strategies at a young age will help students as they learn high level comprehension strategies in later grades (personal communication, December 14, 2016). Retelling

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encourages students to explore all story elements and connect them together.

Retelling is also important because it encourages students to use oral discussions to explain their understanding. During these oral discussions, students are providing details about a story they are familiar with. If the students have an understanding of the units of text, they will be able to use rich vocabulary and syntax to give an overview of the events taking place. This will help build vocabulary and syntax, which are both predictors for later reading success (Foorman, Herrera, Petscher, Mitchell, & Truckenmiller, 2015). The oral discussions will also help to increase understanding (Kucer, 2014) and enriches language (Lapp et al., 2010).

Lastly, retelling is important because reading is much more than decoding the text. Reading success is a product of both decoding and comprehension (Foorman et al., 2015). Having exposure to a variety of comprehension strategies is a key characteristic to competent readers. By working to provide students with a variety of strategies, teachers allow students the flexibility to find what strategy works best for them when identifying story elements. Therefore, students become stronger, more confident readers (Gutierrez-Braojos et al., 2014). Retelling is one way for teachers to ensure that students understand the information in the text. It shows that students are able to take details from a story and create a picture in their head (H. Hammond, personal communication, December 14, 2016).

Students who struggle with decoding may also benefit from retelling practice. Even without the ability to decode, students can learn comprehension by listening to stories. Listening comprehension helps improve reading education by exposing students

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to inference making, vocabulary, and working memory (Gutierrez-Braojos et al., 2014).

Overall, it is important for all students to have exposure to comprehension whether they are already proficiently decoding or if they are working on building their listening comprehension.

Strategies To Improve Proficiency

There are many strategies teachers can implement to help improve retelling proficiency. These strategies can be done small group, whole group, or can be done during independent work time. However, before retelling can be used in any of these settings, students must be taught how to retell. It is important to ensure that students know the expectations before they are asked to retell. This is the first way to improve proficiency. There are several steps to take while teaching students how to retell proficiently. First, the teacher must explain the purpose of retelling in terms that are age appropriate. In primary grades, this will look simpler than in intermediate grades. After students understand the purpose of retelling, they then can begin to practice with a story they are familiar with. They may practice using a book, but it could also be a their favorite movie. Once the students have finished retelling the story, the class can discuss the similarities and differences between retelling and the original. This method should continue at least four times before the students are comfortable with the strategies (Fisher & Frey, 2009). After performing all of these steps, teachers can move into more specific strategies to improve retelling proficiency.

Once students are familiar with retelling, teachers may begin small group instruction. During small group instruction, students can work on accountable talk within

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the small group or with a partner. Accountable talk requires students to stay on topic, use accurate and appropriate information, and think deeply about the ideas being shared (Fisher & Frey, 2009). Small group is a time for students to work on building oral vocabulary and discussing similarities and differences between all students' retellings. This is also a time for students to work on comprehension monitoring. While comprehension monitoring, students will look for inconsistencies in stories. These inconsistencies can be purposefully placed by the teacher or take place during another student's retelling. When comprehension monitoring students must use what they know about the story to ensure the correct information is being presented (Strasser & del Rio, 2013). During small group work times, teachers are better able to see what story elements students are grasping and where deficits may be.

After discovering deficient areas, teachers can reteach those specific strategies whole group. This can be done through extra discussion and modeling. Teachers may also do oral readings during this whole group time. Oral reading enhances comprehension (Kucer, 2014). After oral reading, it is more beneficial for teachers to do a retelling rather than asking questions (Fisher & Frey, 2009). Students can use a five-finger retell to help with this. The five-finger retell gives students specific things to look for while they are reading or listening to a story. Students are asked to listen for characters, setting, beginning, middle, and end. For an additional reminder about what to listen for, students can make and wear retelling gloves with pictures or words to represent the story elements (Blickenstaff, Hallquist, & Kipel, 2013). Teachers can then measure listening comprehension for students who are not decoding large amounts of text yet

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(Foorman et al., 2015).

Another strategy to improve retelling is to have students work on improving knowledge of story elements during independent work time. One strategy for this is text mapping. Text mapping asks students to create their own illustrations, which helps improve understanding (Lapp et al., 2010). Students may be asked to identify one element from the story in their map or illustrate the sequence of the whole story. Once students have become comfortable with the illustrations, they can start to add relational words. Adding relational words provides familiarity and language cues (Lapp et al., 2010). Students can share maps and retell the story, including story elements, to a partner. Sharing with a partner can help enrich language and increase students' familiarity with the important parts of the text (Lapp et al., 2010).

In addition to text mapping, students can also listen to audiobooks to help students improve retelling proficiency (Pearman, 2008). By listening to audiobooks, students are involved in less decoding so energy can be applied to comprehension. The sound effects used in audiobooks help to draw out emotional connections of listeners (Pearman, 2008). These connections help students perform better on comprehension tests (Strasser & del Rio, 2013). Listening to stories assists with students' language and aids in word pronunciations (Pearman, 2008). An audiobook can be used in addition to text mapping at an independent workstation.

Ways of Evaluating

There are multiple ways of evaluating students' learning by their ability to retell. A way to measure students' growth during a unit is to give pre and post tests. These tests

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can measure amount of story elements recalled and areas where students continue to struggle (Blickenstaff et al., 2013). Many of these tests are selected response; however, they can also be done by asking students to retell the story orally. As previously stated, retelling can more accurately gauge students' knowledge because there are no context clues provided in the questions asked (Kucer, 2014). After students have given their retellings, teachers can ask questions to extend what the reader has already mentioned (Kucer, 2014).

After listening to retellings and asking further questions, there are several ways to evaluate students' learning and growth. The first strategy is to transcribe the retellings and segment them into clauses. Those clauses can then be compared to the original text. In these comparisons, teachers should be looking for matches, substitutions, additions, summaries, conflicts, rearrangements, and omissions (Kucer, 2014). By identifying these items, teachers can guide teaching to best-fit areas in which students are deficient.

Another way of evaluating students is by using a retelling rubric. In this process, students give an oral retelling and teachers follow a set rubric to determine if students are providing adequate information. Retelling rubrics often include key ideas, details, sequence, conclusion, and delivery (Fisher & Frey, 2009). Some rubrics may allow teachers to ask additional questions based on students responses as well (Kucer, 2014).

Closure

Comprehension strategies should be introduced in primary grades to help students gain familiarity with the language and concepts. Teachers can measure students' understanding by asking them to retell the text. This is the most accurate way to measure

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understanding because there are no prompts in the questions being asked. To improve retelling proficiency, there are several strategies that can be implemented during whole group, small group, and individual work time. By working to improve retelling proficiency, teachers are helping to set their students up for future success as readers.

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