

# Five Minutes a Day to Improve Comprehension Monitoring in Oral Language Contexts

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A systematic and explicit instructional routine for comprehension monitoring in oral language contexts was developed for children in pre-kindergarten. Results indicated that children who received the instruction improved at identifying inconsistencies in short stories compared to those who received typical instruction, with a medium effect size ( $d = 0.57$ ).

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Comprehension monitoring is not limited to the reading context, it also applies to the oral context for children's listening comprehension, which is a critical foundation for reading comprehension. A systematic and explicit instructional routine for comprehension monitoring in oral language contexts was developed for children at pre-kindergarten. Instruction was provided in small groups for approximately 5 min a day for 4 days a week over 8 weeks. Results indicated that children

who received the instruction were better at identifying inconsistencies in short stories compared to those children who received typical instruction, with a medium effect size ( $d = 0.57$ ).

- Oral language comprehension is an essential skill for daily interactions and for reading comprehension.
- Recent emerging evidence suggests that language comprehension at the discourse level (commonly referred to as listening comprehension) draws on a highly complex set of abilities and knowledge. These include working memory, attentional control, vocabulary, syntax, inference making, perspective taking, and comprehension monitoring.
- Successful comprehension of texts (oral or written) requires construction of a coherent mental model, which has been called the situation model.
- A proposition is the basic unit idea/thought.
- Initial and elementary propositions should be interconnected to establish global coherence.
- The comprehender should evaluate and monitor their understanding of the text as the situation model is updated with incoming information.
- Comprehension monitoring is the ability to reflect on and evaluate one's comprehension of text (spoken or written).
- Comprehension is typically measured by assessing a child's ability to detect inconsistencies in stories.
- Good readers know when they fail to understand and are confused.
- Comprehension monitoring has been widely promoted as a strategy to help students resolve confusion or comprehension failure in the context of reading.



## **The study**

The present study examines the potential effect of explicit instruction on comprehension monitoring in oral language contexts for children in pre-kindergarten from low socioeconomic family backgrounds. A brief instructional routine (lasting approximately 5 min a day) targeting inconsistency detection was developed. While Instruction was delivered in small groups (three to four children), the routine is flexible and appropriate for whole class or one-on-one instruction.

## **Participants**

The study included 75 children at pre-kindergarten (mean age = 57 months), all of whom were recruited from high-poverty schools. Of the children, 41 were randomly assigned to the treatment condition and 34 were assigned to the comparison (practice-as-usual) condition. Five children dropped-out, leaving 70 children in the post-test.

## **Comprehension monitoring assessment:**

- Children heard stories consisting of two to three sentences and were asked to identify whether the stories were silly or made sense.

## **The intervention**

- Intervention was conducted in small groups of four children, typically four times per week for 8 weeks.
- Each lesson had a scaffolded learning format of I-do, we-do, and you-do.
- Lessons were sequenced, starting from external inconsistencies and transitioning to internal

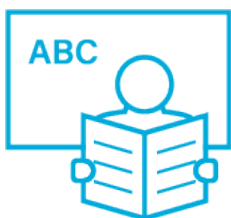
inconsistencies, because internal inconsistencies were initially too challenging.

- The ratio of inconsistent versus consistent stories was approximately two to one.
- At the end of each lesson, the interventionist concluded by stating 'when you listen to a story, you have to listen carefully so that you know if the story is silly or makes sense to you. If the story does not make sense to you, then you should stop, think about it, and ask questions.'



## Findings

- Children had superior mean pre-test results on external inconsistency items compared to internal consistency items.
- The intervention's effect size after adjusting for children's pre-test was 0.57 ( $p = 0.008$ ), which is considered medium.



## Summary

- In this study, the effect of explicit instruction on children's comprehension monitoring was examined.
- Explicit instruction on comprehension monitoring had a

positive, medium sized effect after 8 weeks of small group instruction.

- The results indicate that children in pre-kindergarten can be taught to identify inconsistencies in short stories, regardless of whether they are external or internal.
- Children found comprehension monitoring instruction engaging and the silly and inconsistent stories amusing (when identified).
- One important aspect of the described instructional routine is its ease of use and flexibility.
- The lesson can be flexibly applied to varied group sizes such as individual children, small groups, or whole classes.
- During reading activities, the teacher may insert questions at appropriate moments about whether the focal part of the story makes sense to children and why.
- Teachers can employ a questioning strategy during conversations with individual children. For example, when things are not clear during a conversation, the teacher can explicitly request further information from the child by stating 'This part does not make sense to me. Would you tell me more about \_?'
- The overall concept is to enhance children's monitoring of their own understanding of stories or utterances in daily interactions and probe further when something does not make sense.