Proposals for developing strategies to improve reading comprehension in a new Instructional Program in Spanish LEE COMPRENSIVA*MENTE*

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INTRODUCTION

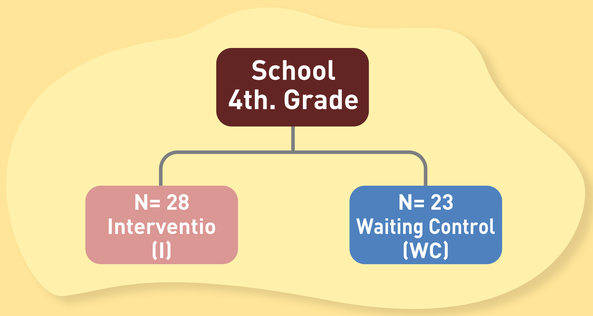
Reading is a complex skill which involves reading comprehension (Defior, 2006). The product of sucessful reading comprehension is a coherent representation of the text meaning refered to a situational model (Kintsch, 1998) or mental model (Johnson Laird, 1980). Students need to build deep knowledge that is interconnected, coherent and includes understanding of potential causal mechanisms. It requires using a variety of strategies that afford making connections between ideas expressed in the content, and background knowledge. Most readers need strategy instruction to improve this process and it is particularly necessary and effective for those students that are struggling most, mainly those with less domain knowledge or lower reading skills (McNamara D. 2004, 2007). The skills induced by the strategies become more authomatical after practice.

PURPOSE

Based on the results of our previous research into the relationship between decoding and reading comprehension, this project is aimed at observing the effects of an explicit and active reading comprehension instructional intervention on 4th grade children. This program, designed through a careful selection of texts and activities, is based on vocabulary, inference making and metacognitive strategies (Oakhill, 2004, 2006) as monitoring and text structure recognition.

METHOD

Participants: two whole class parallel groups (8-9 years), 21 children in control group (CG) and 28 children, intervention group (IG). Each child was tested individually, following schools' and parents' written consent.

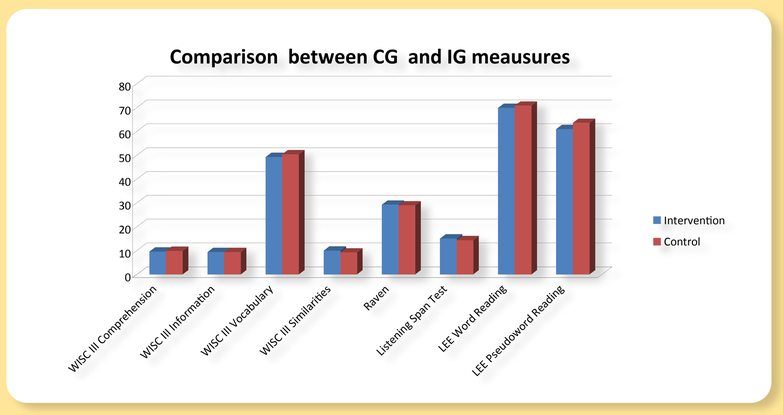


DESIGN

Pretest, instruction period (two 80-minute weekly sessions each during 8 weeks), to finish with a post test.

PRETEST

There were no significant differences between the intervention and the control group in all meausures applied: Verbal General Ability (Conprehension, Information,Vocabulary and Similarities from WISC III), Raven Matrice, Listening Span Test and LEE Word and Pseudoword Reading.



INTERVENTION

The instructional program is based on reciprocal teaching (Palinscar and Brown, 1984) structured around four strategies: questioning, summarizing, clarifying and predicting. We added visualizing-verbalizing (Bell, 1986) and active reading (MacNamara D, 2006,2007). Active reading involves different strategies that the readers use to unvail the text meaning.

The program is divided into 14 task units (7 narrative and 7 expositive texts) structured with the same format. It includes activities specially chosen to increase in difficulty gradually.

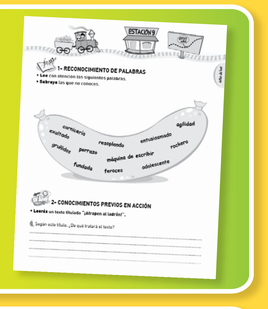
In each task unit, time was divided into three moments clearly identified: before reading, while reading and after reading. The activities were organized around a topic and a meaningful text.

- Strategies are made explicit and modelled by the teacher.
- After practice and feedback the aim is for the students to discuss and to collectively construct meaning.
- The program begins teaching reading comprehension strategies based on the goal of making children acquire independent practice, later to be applied in similar situations.
- Opportunities for consolidation and reflection were given throughout the program.

All the activities used in this program are based on four axes:

VOCABULARY

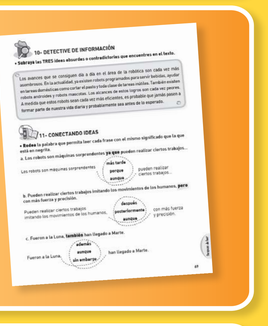
These activities start by introducing certain chosen words, some unknown to them, others with prefix, suffix, complex spelling groups, homophones and words with phonological or semantic difficulties.



MONITORING

Abilities to become aware of the reader's own lack of text comprehension. Monitoring is the reader's comprehension skill to become aware of the fact that:

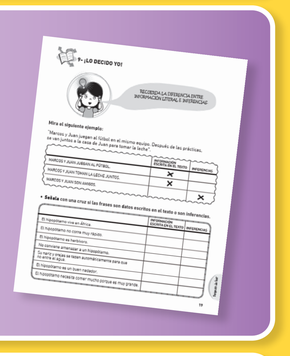
- he can't follow the text content or idea.
- the text information is contradictory.
- he doesn't know the meaning of a word, phrase and or paragraph.
- the meaning of the word is not applicable to the context.



INFERENCE MAKING

Activities in this axe focus on different types of inferential processing which were introduced progressively across the units Focus on por engaged.

a. Lexical inferencing
b. Connective inferencing
c. Elaborative inferencing
d. Guessing missing information

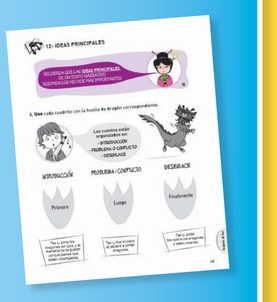


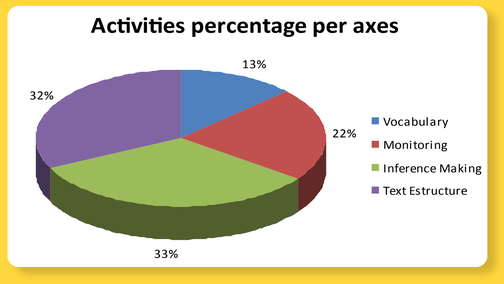
TEXT STRUCTURE

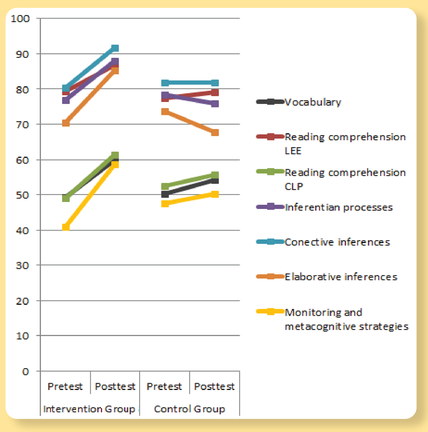
Refers to the internal organization of a text. We worked with main ideas, secondary ideas and topics. The program includes the use of graphic organizers.

At this school level, children work with different types of texts that can be classified according to their structure as follows: narrative and expositive texts.

The expository texts are included with different structures (comparison, description, chronological order, cause and effect, and problem and solution).







RESULTS

In the pretest session we found no statistical differences between the intervention and the control group in age, verbal reasoning, verbal comprehension (WISC III), non verbal reasoning (Raven), Word and Pseudoword Reading (LEE), Reading Comprehension (LEE), and Listening Span Test. After the instruction period both groups (CG and IG) were tested again with Vocabulary (Wisc III) LEE Test, CLP and Monitoring.

In order to compare the performance of both groups in the pre-test and post-test different ANOVAS were displayed. An interaction effect was found in all measures assessed. Using Bonferroni contrast to compare pretest and post test measures, we found significant differences in the intervention group [$p \leftarrow .01$] but not in the control group [n.s.] in: vocabulary, reading comprehension (LEE and CLP), inferential processes, connective and elaborative inferences, monitoring and metacognitive strategies. All these improvements have led to ameliorate in reading comprehension general measures.

LEE comprensivaMente program has proved to be an efficient tool in order to enhance reading comprehension in 4th graders.

DISCUSSION

- By engaging readers actively using metacognitive strategies, children felt highly motivated to take part in the work.
- Teachers and students became aware of the importance of inference generation as a useful resource for full text meaning comprehension.
- The oral work between students and teachers proved to be a significant tool to enhance reading comprehension.
- There was significant improvement in monitoring texts. Children mastered not only their searching skills to find words or phrases unknown but also their ability to detect new information.
- Metacognitive strategies such as re-reading, looking back, thinking aloud, and mental imagery were proved to be relevant.
- Two months of intensive work, during class time (twice a week), were enough to reach the program goals.

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