

Annual Reporting 2021

Action Research Outreach

<p>Strategic Aim:</p>	<p>School Performance Strengthen and embed best practice in Leadership at Ruru Specialist School including Values -based and solution-focused approaches across all leadership levels</p>
<p>Annual Aim:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Strengthen best practice succession planning. · Identify and monitoring the various competencies available in the school and matching them to the school's future needs Value and maximise leader's strengths. · Teams will develop their pedagogical leadership. · Leadership effectiveness and capabilities will be reviewed through the appraisal system.
<p>Target:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Teams will complete action research in identified priority learning areas · OUTREACH – Guided Reading Programme ARA · Teams will complete professional learning to develop their own leadership practice · Development of a learning-focused appraisal approach in staff growth & development cycles · Engage the services of EMPOWER YOU –Leadership consultants to strengthen capacity and capability of leaders to support best practice

Actions <i>What did we do?</i>	Outcomes <i>What happened?</i>	Evaluation <i>Where to next?</i>	Future Directions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Discussed learning areas for our students we wanted to make improvements around ❖ We felt that many of our students shared challenges with reading comprehension ❖ We researched the relationship between Reading Comprehension and Autism and found that this a well-documented area of challenge for some students ❖ Used an action research model to develop and test a guided reading programme with our students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The Anchor, Read, Apply (ARA) programme has a lot of potential to enhance our reading programmes for students who will benefit from additional support around reading comprehension. ❖ ARA emphasises maximizing thinking and activating prior knowledge using the 3-step strategy below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ <u>Anchor</u>: Activating or building background knowledge with a particular purpose ➢ <u>Read</u>: Can be reading or listening to text ➢ <u>Apply</u>: Complete a task after reading directly related to the stated purpose <p>An important feature of the programme is repeated reading of the same text with a different purpose to focus the reader on each time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ All students targeted in this action research showed improvement in their ability to attend to meaning in text. ❖ While some students found the emphasis on comprehension challenging - particularly to begin with, for other students the opportunity to express their knowledge, understanding, and ideas has given them a greater sense of success around their engagement in the reading programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ We will further implement the ARA programme with our outreach students in 2022. ❖ We will develop tools to support teacher aids provide continuity throughout the week with the programme ❖ This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ PD or opportunities for TA's to observe sessions ➢ More specific lesson plans for individual students that are easier for TA's to follow ➢ More IEP goals that will work well with the programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ This programme took longer to implement than expected. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ This was largely due to teachers learning to work with the programme themselves. We wanted to familiarise ourselves with the programme and develop competency before trying to pass on knowledge and resources to Teacher Aides in our various schools. ➢ The individuality of each student meant that adjustments and modifications were needed to get each student started. ❖ We intend to move on from using the online ARA lesson plans in 2022 and develop or modify them to suit the needs of individual students and TA's better.
Report completed by:			
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Date of Report: 16/11/21			

Action Research - Outreach

Focus Area: Using a guided reading programme (ARA) to improve students' text comprehension.



Anchor, Read, Apply (ARA) is a guided reading programme that teaches students how to comprehend text. The emphasis is around maximizing thinking using the 3-step strategy below.

Anchor: Activating or building background knowledge with a particular purpose

Read: Can be reading or listening to text

Apply: Complete a task directly related to the stated purpose

Comprehension requires a student to know how to draw upon existing knowledge, skills, and experiences to construct their understanding of the text. Having a clear purpose before reading helps to focus the student on the most important information in the text. Completing a clearly linked task after reading helps the student apply what they have learned.

An important feature of the programme is **repeated reading of the same text** with a different purpose to focus the reader on each time.

Rationale

Outreach staff have observed students having difficulty responding to questions about texts that they have read or have been read to them. In some cases, students have shown that they are able to decode text (sometimes even outperform their peers) but are unable to answer questions asked to demonstrate their comprehension. Some students will happily provide facts related to the subject matter instead of directly addressing the question asked. Other students have comprehension ability but currently lack the ability/technology to demonstrate this due to communication or reading difficulties.

A review of research would indicate that there is a well-documented relationship between students with ASD and difficulties with reading comprehension. Three factors, in particular, have been identified as contributors.

Theory of Mind: The ability to understand others' point of view e.g., relating to how others feel or predicting how they will behave

Central Coherence: The ability to bring details together to form a whole concept or idea

Executive Functioning: The process of organising, planning, and monitoring progress e.g., sequencing or linking the events of a story or creating mental images

While comprehension is generally considered a "covert" activity (taking place inside a students' mind) educators can "overtly" teach skills to develop students' thinking. (*ref. Reading Comprehension and Autism in the Primary General Education Classroom, N. N. Nguyen, P. Leytham, P. Schaefer Whitby, G.I. Gelfer*)

We believe that our outreach students will benefit from a reading programme that targets comprehension. We have selected the ARA programme and our research question is “Can we improve comprehension by overtly teaching thinking skills?”

The action we took to measure this initially was around getting to know any new students by building our relationships with them. We observed students and used the following tools depending on what was appropriate for each student:

- Running records
- Recorded answers to questions given by students
- Photographs and written records of comments made verbally or on AAC devices
- Anecdotal recordings of our observations

What did we do (how is the programme different from what we have been doing)

We trailed the ARA lesson plans - there are several pre-written plans on the *Literacy for all instruction* website. Most can be adapted for any text and cover different aspects of a text. For example...

- Identifying a problem
- Identifying the character's feelings
- Comparing two texts
- Describe the characters
- Book review

IEPs were developed for students to complete comprehension questions. Some students used their AAC devices for this. Visuals were used to support other students to choose answers. For example, the following visual was used with a student for the book review lesson. They could choose answers to questions such as “was the story too long, too short, or good”, “How did you feel when ... happened” etc.



Assessment tools

Running record/PROBE Reading Comprehension Assessment

Recording answers to comprehension questions

Teacher Reflection

Challenges faced

Continuity of specialist teacher time with the student each week.

New students and building a relationship to encourage reading.

Covid

Conclusion/results/thoughts about how it went

Because we used a variety of assessment tools to cater for individual students, we do not have summative assessments for all students so we will include a brief discussion on learning outcomes for each target student below.

Student 1

This student is a capable reader. He has just turned 7 and can decode texts for his age level with 99% accuracy. At the start of this year, he found answering questions about what he had read very challenging. He was unable to pass the comprehension component of a running record test at or below his reading level.

When I began using the ARA programme with him, he was resistant to the pre-reading Anchor discussion activity. He just wanted to read. He appeared to find the 'intent' of a question difficult to grasp. He answered all questions with information pertaining to the story topic but never actually answered questions.

During the process of using this programme I have had to modify plans along the way. For example, instead of using a variety of anchor activities I still use the same activity with this student each session. We start by talking about the cover picture and what he thinks the story will be about. My attempts to introduce discussions to activate other prior knowledge have proven frustrating for him so far but he seems to accept the obligatory cover picture discussion. I have also added to the direct teaching component of the programme by showing the student the paragraphs containing the answers to questions so that he can re-read them. I found this worked very well and I do not need to do this very often now.

I think the process to date has been successful for this student. He seems to be developing an awareness that reading is not just about saying words. He knows there is an expectation for him to discuss the stories and I believe this is helping him to process and retain written information. He is now able to answer direct questions about the texts quite well. Inference and opinion questions are the next challenge!

Student 2

This student is approaching their 100 sight-word milestone. Phonological awareness and other decoding skills are very limited. In general, he can read books on familiar topics quite well but will find other reading material – even simple stories about unfamiliar topics – very challenging.

My biggest challenge has been finding texts that have relatable themes for him while avoiding books of special interest. I find it more difficult to get him to attend to questions about books with pictures of helicopters or trucks – which he really enjoys – but he also becomes very distracted by his own thoughts and statements about the pictures. I am unsure how much of his comprehension comes from just the picture cues and how much from reading text.

I initially found getting him to choose an answer helpful e.g., "Was the dad too big or too small to get through the window?" and used visuals (like the chart above) to help focus him on discussions. I can now do this verbally but still often give choices to prompt him to indicate his understanding. While I think he is still in the early stages of developing comprehension I feel the ARA programme will provide a good pathway for his future learning.

Student 3

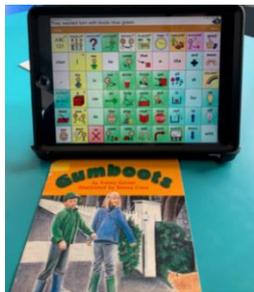
This student recognises only a handful of sight-words at this stage and has challenges with his speech which makes communicating his ideas difficult. He really enjoys looking through books and being read to, but his 'processing' challenges have kept him at the emergent reading level.

The ARA programme has been great for this student as it has exposed him to more age appropriate and interesting texts and enabled him to focus and succeed at communicating his thoughts - rather than struggling to decode at a basic level.

He has a TouchChat device for communication. I have found the programme also beneficial for encouraging him to use and practise with his device.

I began by reading the books to the student. He has recently begun a C-Pen trial and is now able to use this to scan and read text for him independently. He uses a combination of speech, visuals, and his AAC device to answer questions at each stage of the ARA lesson. He has been able to demonstrate good comprehension. I recently gave him a PROBE assessment to try. He was able to use his C-Pen to independently scan and read the text. He gave good answers to all questions – albeit limited by the scope of the language installed on his device. For example, one question asked what the word ‘funny’ meant in the phrase ‘funny noise’. He clearly knew it didn’t mean humorous and searched around until he found ‘afraid’. In the context of the story, I felt this was a reasonably accurate answer.

I like that this programme has challenged me to rethink my reading programme with this student. We continue to work on developing the skills that he needs for reading – but I have a much better appreciation of what he understands and am able to focus more on his strengths.



In the photo above this student has used their AAC device to answer the question “what was the problem in the story?”. He has written “They wanted turn with boots blue green”. to explain that the children liked each other's boots better than their own, so they ended up with one of each colour each.

Student 4

This student is new to our Outreach programme this year he is 6 years old. It has taken a long time to build a rapport with him to achieve and work on individual goals. He is currently reading at level 12. He likes to read his books as quick as possible which makes it difficult to understand and he has a very strong accent.

He is unable to pass the comprehension component of a running record test which makes it difficult to assess his comprehension understanding. It has been challenging to get consistency with him to read his book each day. I have slowly introduced the ARA programme to him by taking the stress away and reading books to him initially. We are repeating the same book every day for a week reading for a different purpose each time to encourage him to listen and read the whole book. We have an IEP developed around answering a “where” question in relation to the book. Eg where is the kite and encouraging the student to point. We are still at the early stages of understanding that books are more than just for reading and saying words.

Student 5

This student is year 6 and is moving onto high school 2022. She knows all sight words from magenta, red and blue lists within her school. She is currently reading at level 12.

Overall the ARA programme has been successful for her and this shows in her running records that were completed. While completing this programme we have used the same book for the week with good continuity and expectations among support staff have been the same. We have used the lesson plans and adapted them where required to best fit the needs of the texts being read. It has been successful for transferring this learning into other areas for this student around friendships. Taking the knowledge from the “feelings” lesson plans and applying this will be useful in preparation for high school.

While this student is verbal some words can be hard to understand so she has an AAC device. We have encouraged her during this programme to also use her AAC device which will also help in her new learning environment for 2022. For example, In the story pictured below Mya is upset, what has happened? The student used her device to answer “the door shut on her finger”



Summary

The ARA programme has a lot of potential to enhance reading programmes for students who will benefit from additional support around comprehension. All students targeted in this action research showed improvement in their ability to attend to meaning in text. While some students found the emphasis on comprehension challenging - particularly to begin with, for other students the opportunity to express their knowledge, understanding, and ideas has given them a greater sense of success around their engagement in the reading programme.

Next steps

- Putting programme in place for Teacher Aid to continue with
- More specific lesson plans for students using AAC