

The Effect of Oral and Written Retell Strategies for Informational Text on Reading  
Comprehension Performance of Fifth Grade Students

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relative effectiveness of the oral retell strategy versus the written retell strategy for aiding reading comprehension of informational text among average fifth grade readers ( $n = 16$ ). The measurement tool was the Baltimore County Content Link Assessment. This study involved the use of a pretest/posttest design. The results of the pretest confirmed the groups did not differ prior to the intervention. Posttest scores were compared to assess the comparative effectiveness of the two instructional models. There were no significant differences in the mean reading comprehension scores between the oral retell group (Mean = 9.00, SD = 1.07) and the written retell group (Mean = 9.25 SD = 1.91) [ $t(14) = -.32, p > .05$ ]. Implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

As educators forge ahead into the “information age” of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there continues to be concern over the number of individuals who are considered to be illiterate. With each new report received on the state of our country’s educational system, we learn that more and more children are falling behind even though *No Child Left Behind’s* intent was to assure that all students become literate.

Our society now has even greater demands and expectations as citizens are required to be effective problem solvers to meet the needs of our modern economy. Citizens are not only expected to be literate in basic comprehension of information, but to be able to function at even higher levels of literacy. Today’s jobs require more complex thinking and problem solving skills with the added ability to be literate in the use of technology. In the past, individuals may have been able to function at minimal levels of literacy, but with fewer jobs available for unskilled workers, and more and more jobs requiring higher levels of literacy, the literacy rate in our country must meet the needs of our modern technological society.

In an analysis of educational outcomes among similarly qualified developed nations, the United States maintains a high-ranking status. However, there is growing concern about the future of illiterate Americans in our country. When the International Adult Literacy Survey compared the literacy skills in 12 industrialized countries, which include Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, this survey found that at least 25 percent of adults in

these countries failed to reach minimal levels of literacy proficiency that are considered necessary for meeting the demands of everyday life and work. Educators across our country continue to share concern over the number of students who are failing at achieving literacy. According to the United States Department of Education, more than 8 million students in grades 4-12 are considered struggling readers (Grigg, Daane, Jin, & Campbell, 2003). Research also shows that students who are considered poor readers are more likely to drop out of high school. It is reported that over 3,000 students drop out of high school every school day (Grigg et al., 2003). These statistics suggest that there is a strong correlation between struggling readers and the completion of high school education.

There is a variety of negative life outcomes associated with lack of a high school diploma and/or literacy skills. Studies also show that students who do not complete high school will have fewer opportunities to obtain jobs that will provide adequate levels of income. A statistic found to be even more discouraging is that 59% of individuals who fill our jails and prisons are illiterate (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu & Dunleavy, 2007). Other research reports that individuals who are illiterate are twice as likely to be unemployed even though many of these individuals desire to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century job market.

As educators attempt to prepare students today for tomorrow's workforce, it becomes more apparent that effective reading programs and interventions must be implemented to help students to successfully complete the educational process. Students must begin the comprehension process at the very beginnings of learning to read or else they will risk falling further behind. It is shown that students who are able to successfully comprehend text will be able to access information and become better problem-solvers which is what experts believe is a most necessary skill for the future. Students who are not able to be successful with comprehension

must be provided with interventions that will close the gap in the area of reading comprehension that is preventing them from fully comprehending text. More than ever, educators must make instructional decisions that will make the greatest impact on students' comprehension while still meeting the time restraints within each school day.

Forty-five out of 50 states are now preparing to meet the needs of students regarding the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Many states have agreed to a set of shared goals and expectations for what students should be able to understand and do in order to be able to be prepared for success in college and the workforce. School systems understand the need for effective first instruction in meeting the needs of our students. More than ever, educators are all working toward developing a core reading program that will effectively help all students to progress toward proficiency and beyond. It is understood that a reading program in itself will not move students towards proficiency, but rather the explicit instruction provided by the teacher through a balanced literacy approach. Teachers must be cognizant of the needs of each student. Teachers must also prepare engaging lessons that meet the reader's understanding, but also provide responsive instruction so as to not delay learning.

There are many intervention programs and instructional strategies that teachers are trained in that can help readers who may struggle with comprehending text. These intervention programs can be effective in helping students to increase their comprehension so that they are able to gain understanding and meaning from text that they may not have been able to without the provided strategies.

Out of the numerous reading programs and interventions designed to help children to become proficient readers - the implementation of oral and written retell strategies - has been

shown to improve the reading comprehension and literacy of students (Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan, 2010). These researchers found that students were better able to recall elements from a story after they engaged in oral retelling and were also found to answer more literal and inferential comprehension questions correctly.

Schisler et al. (2010) also wanted to determine if there was a difference between the oral retell strategy and the written retell strategy as far as improving comprehension. The authors also noted that the effectiveness of the written retell strategy had not been previously studied. Schisler et al. (2010) also wanted to compare the oral and written retell strategies to the commonly used passage review strategy. The passage review strategy is when students read the text silently and then reread the essential portions of the text to help better recall details that help gain a deeper understanding of the content read.

The purpose of their study was to examine the instructional effectiveness and efficiency of oral retellings, written retellings, and passage review procedures for students with reading comprehension delays. The results of their study found that students were able to correctly answer more literal and inferential questions when using the oral and written strategies when compared to just using the passage review strategy. In addition, these researchers found that the oral and written strategies promoted instructional efficiency as it required less time to implement the oral and retell strategies than the passage review strategy. However, they did not find a significant difference in the effectiveness of oral and written retell strategies.

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to examine the differential effectiveness of oral and written retell strategies on the comprehension level of fifth grade students reading informational texts.

The independent variable in this study was the type of retelling strategy—oral or written. The dependent variable was the comprehension scores of the fifth grade participants on the Baltimore County Public Schools’ Content Link assessment (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2004).

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that the reading comprehension score on the Baltimore County Public Schools’ Content Link Assessment of the students receiving the oral retell strategy intervention will not differ significantly from the performance of the students receiving the written retell strategy intervention.

### **Operational Definitions**

***Reading Comprehension:*** For the purpose of this study, reading comprehension was defined as the student performance on the Baltimore County Public Schools’ Content Link Assessment. The calculation of the score is determined by the student responses to 9 multiple-choice questions and one brief constructed response question with a total value of 12 points. Questions assess the comprehension of the informational text read.

***Oral retelling instruction:*** Students read informational texts two times and then have three minutes to retell orally the most important details of the text.

***Written retelling instruction:*** Students read information texts two times and then have three minutes to write down the most important details of the text that they have read.

When asking students to retell the most important details of the text, the student should be retelling details that demonstrate the “big idea” of what was read.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This literature review will discuss the topic of poor reading comprehension by students at the elementary school level. The first section of this review will discuss the components and cognitive foundations of reading comprehension. The successive sections will explore the characteristics of proficient readers as well as the characteristics of readers with poor comprehension skills. The last section will discuss research-based strategies and interventions designed to improve reading comprehension.

#### **The Components of Reading Comprehension**

As far back as 1917, educators have described reading comprehension as a very complex procedure that involves the organization and cooperation of many different forces in order to produce the final response (Fisher, Lapp, & Frey, 2011). Researchers define comprehension as an active process in which readers use background knowledge and a wide range of cognitive processes to construct a coherent representation of text (Catts, 2009). According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension is defined as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Snow describes a socio-cultural context that states that comprehension must entail the three elements of reader, text, and activity; the reader being the one who is doing the comprehending; the text that is to be comprehended; and the activity in which comprehension is a part.

In order for comprehension to occur, a reader must have a wide range of capacities and abilities. Cognitive capacities include attention memory, critical analytic ability, the ability to make inferences, and the ability to visualize. Readers must also have a purpose for reading and

an interest in the content being read along with knowledge of vocabulary, domain, and topic knowledge.

Reports from research and the larger educational community demonstrate that too many students have limited ability to comprehend text (McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009). It has been found that traditionally, learning through reading has been delayed until children have learned how to read using familiar topics in stories. Experts now conclude that learning to read should be integrated with reading to learn. Although changes are occurring in elementary classes, analysis of reading materials has shown that up to 90% of reading materials are found to be stories rather than informational text. Research shows that young children can appreciate and understand informational text and that they can be taught strategies to learn from what they are reading (Baker, Dreher, Shiplet, Beall, Voelker, Garrett, & Finger-Elam, 2011).

*No Child Left Behind* brought on a nationwide emphasis on early reading achievement that had, as its primary focus, the development of the basic skill of word recognition. Researchers believe that the ability to read words fluently and automatically is critical to achievement, but it is not sufficient. Nor is the ability to comprehend stories sufficient. As previously mentioned, stories comprise a major proportion of the materials children encounter in their early reading instruction, but older students are expected to comprehend and learn from informational text. Older students must also continue to do so as they move through school and into the job market. Therefore, the student's ability to comprehend informational text is also critical to achievement in school and beyond. National experts have begun to recommend that children be given more exposure to informational text in the early years of schooling (Baker et al., 2011).

## **Characteristics of Students Who Demonstrate Reading Proficiency**

Most educators agree that competent readers exhibit a set of discernible characteristics. Competent readers are found by researchers to be able to actively construct meaning through an integrative process. These readers interact and transact with the words on the page and integrate new information with their pre-existing knowledge structures. Competent readers then use their prior knowledge, experience, attitude, and perspective to determine the ways that the information can be perceived, understood, valued, and stored. These cognitive processes are referred to as reading strategies. Through the use of these strategies, readers develop automaticity as they work with texts. In other words, reading skills begin to operate without the reader's conscious awareness or deliberate control.

Thompkins (2004) states that students who are proficient in reading comprehension are fluent oral and silent readers. They view reading as a process of creating meaning, decode words rapidly, have large vocabularies, and understand the organization of stories, plays, informational books, poems, and other texts. Proficient readers also use a variety of strategies and monitor their understanding as they read.

Students who comprehend the text focus their attention on looking for coherence in the passage they are reading and integrating the text with what they know about the topic. This implies that schools need to provide children with opportunities to gain broad content knowledge. Comprehension is dependent on this knowledge in order for students to be proficient readers (Catts, 2009).

According to research synthesized by Miller (2002), proficient readers activate relevant, prior knowledge before, during, and after reading. Readers create visual and other sensory images from text during and after reading. Readers ask questions of themselves, the authors, and

the texts they read and determine the most important ideas and themes in a text. Readers are then able to synthesize what they have read. In other words, proficient readers pay attention as they read and are processing their thinking.

Another characteristic of a proficient reader is that they are self-motivated and self-directed. This means that they are able to monitor their own comprehension by questioning, reviewing, revising, and rereading to enhance their understanding or comprehension of the texts. These readers also understand that it is the reader who creates the meaning and not the text or author of the text (Fisher et al., 2011).

### **Characteristics of Students with Poor Comprehension Skills**

Research has shown that children who have reading comprehension problems have limited vocabulary particularly as these children read expository texts. The vocabulary in expository texts has typically more difficult vocabulary words when compared to narrative texts. It has been stated that students who have a lack of experience with expository texts in their early school years will be expected to learn more from expository texts at the upper grade levels. Regardless of having more experience earlier with expository texts, it is found that difficult vocabulary will still cause students to struggle to comprehend expository texts. By the time students enter middle school, they should be able to successfully comprehend expository text. It is found that 75% of texts used in sixth grade and beyond are expository. In addition, approximately 95% of Internet sites visited contains expository texts (Yildirim, Yildiz, & Ates, 2011).

Researchers have also studied how readiness levels, when entering kindergarten; have impacted students' ability to be proficient in reading comprehension. One study compared high readiness students with low readiness students. High readiness students enter school with

phonological readiness skills and are ready to access the general curriculum effectively. But, students who have low readiness skills are not able to access these learning tools due to deficits in phonics understanding. When students do not receive interventions to help them catch up, research has shown that they will be those same students who are poor readers in grade 4 and beyond. These reading readiness skills are also found to be related to poverty that has also contributed to the wide-spread achievement gap between groups of students. This is often termed the Matthew effect where the “rich get richer and poor get poorer.” After grade 4, only 13% of students generally catch up to their peers (Foster & Miller, 2007).

### **Strategies and Interventions for Improving Reading Comprehension**

Researchers all agree that reading comprehension is a complex process in which many skills are used. Students who are proficient readers differentiate according to drawing inferences, deriving word meanings, monitoring comprehension, and using a variety of strategies along with using knowledge of vocabulary as compared to poor readers who are shown to have limited vocabulary. Furthermore, these children have more difficulty in comprehending expository texts due to the fact that these texts include difficult words compared to narrative texts. When Yildirim et al. (2011) performed their study that compared students’ comprehension of narrative texts to expository texts, it was found that the vocabulary was the determining factor in their reading comprehension. Therefore, there was a high correlation between vocabulary and comprehension, and the factors related to word meaning accounted for most of the variance in comprehension. It was also suggested that teachers encourage their students to read more texts that are difficult. Also noted is that children who read less, have many deficiencies in terms of their reading success and lack vocabulary when they are compared with their peers (Yildirim et al., 2011).

### ***Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction***

Students should be explicitly instructed on how to comprehend texts. Andreassen and Braten (2011) explain that four main principles that characterize research-based, explicit comprehension instruction should be implemented. The first principle is to provide instruction focused on building relevant background knowledge. This is the process of helping readers to actively construct text meaning using their background knowledge.

The second principle is the instruction of reading comprehension strategies. Students receive direct teaching of a variety of reading strategies that provide students with the tools they need to construct a deeper understanding of text. These strategies include predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. Teachers should provide repeated modeling of these strategies and not just explain them to students. For students to become self-regulated strategic readers, they need to be able to know each strategy and how it works and eventually deliberately choose an appropriate strategy. Andreassen et al. (2011) states that this is a long-term development that can take years of strategy instruction.

The third principle, which is reading-group organization, is related to the social aspect of comprehension instruction. Cooperative learning within small groups provides opportunities for students at varying levels to provide support to each other that helps in their comprehension process.

Lastly, the fourth principle is reading motivation. Comprehension strategy instruction should be derived from authentic subject matter as well as engaging, interesting texts. When these authors studied the effects of providing students with explicit reading instruction that included all four principles, positive outcomes were identified. In addition, the authors findings

indicate that the effects of reading comprehension instruction may depend on how an intervention is implemented in the classroom as there were some challenges in implementing some of the principles by the teachers. It is suggested that more teacher training may be needed to help students improve their instruction regarding the four principles.

### ***Effectiveness of Oral and Written Retellings***

Comprehending text requires an understanding of vocabulary; recognizing and recalling specific details that includes making inferences, drawing conclusions, and predicting outcomes. Students are expected to have acquired all the skills that are necessary to be able to gain meaning from text. Research shows that too many children fail to achieve reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, lack of comprehension skills can have an adverse effect on performance across content areas in school as well as future opportunities to pursue further schooling or training. A study conducted by Schisler et al. (2010) compared three different reading comprehension strategies to determine if one strategy would be more effective than another in improving reading comprehension. The three strategies included passage review, which was the typical strategy used where students read silently and then reread essential portions of the text to better recall details and gain a deeper understanding of the text. This strategy was then compared to oral and written retelling strategies. The retell strategy is the reading of a text and then the oral retell or written retell of what important details are read. Retellings have been found to boost comprehension of text that students have read. When researchers examined differences between students' retellings of the important details, fourth and fifth grade students were able to answer more literal and inferential comprehension questions. The results also indicated that the retelling strategy was more effective than the questioning strategy for increasing reading comprehension.

Even students who were less proficient readers made gains in answering comprehension questions.

### *Communicative Reading Strategies (CRS)*

Communicative Reading Strategies (CRS) is considered an effective intervention strategy for students who exhibit low reading abilities. It has also improved reading performance of younger children from culturally diverse and low socioeconomic environments. Traditionally, students received decoding-based feedback- meaning that when students read orally, the teacher assists with the decoding of words. With CRS, as the child reads, the interventionist monitors how the child reads the passage to determine whether the child is constructing meaning from the text. The interventionist uses discussion prompts, and cues that help establish the topic and also help to simplify complex sentences. In addition, the interventionist helps the child to connect ideas across passages and units of text. Through comparing the two oral reading feedback strategies, Crowe (2005) suggests that an integrated approach to reading intervention that includes both decoding-based feedback and meaning-based feedback would generate greater reading gains in students.

### **Summary**

All researchers agree that children need to become competent readers in order to function fully in our society and become lifelong learners. Many theories exist as to which reading strategy promotes the greatest gains in reading comprehension. However, with the variety of backgrounds and varying levels of abilities children bring to school, educators must use research-based instructional strategies to help foster reading comprehension. Instructional decisions should be based on student needs and interventions need to be implemented so that students do

not fall further behind in their reading comprehension. Readers must be able to become self-regulated readers, but this will occur only through explicit reading instruction and continued practice of effective reading strategies that readers begin to use with automaticity. Readers can also use oral and written retell strategies to deepen understanding of complex text. When the reader is actively involved with the text and able to use appropriate strategies, they take ownership over their learning and are able to reach their full potential as a reader and lifelong learner.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the differential effectiveness of the oral and written retell strategies on the comprehension level of fifth grade students when reading informational text as measured by the Baltimore County Public Schools' Content Link Assessment (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2004).

#### **Design**

This study employed a pretest-posttest control group design and compared the comprehension scores of a convenience sample of two groups of fifth grade students on the Baltimore County Public Schools' Content Link Assessment. The independent variable in this study was the type of intervention strategy that students received - either oral retelling or written retelling instruction. The dependent variable was the reading comprehension scores of the fifth grade participants on the Baltimore County Public School's Content Link Assessment (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2004).

#### **Subjects**

The subjects in the study were fifth grade students in a school located in a suburban county on the East Coast. The school qualified for Title I services based on overall low socioeconomic status of the student body. Over 74% of the students attending this school qualified for the free and reduced meal program. The estimated average household income in 2009 was \$46,197, while the estimated average household income in Maryland was \$69,272.

The fifth grade subjects were all students from a fifth grade reading class. The 16 participants were grouped based on Maryland State Assessment (MSA) scores and teacher

recommendations. Students were considered average readers and this researcher was their regular education teacher.

The eight students in the oral retelling group consisted of three males and five females. Five of the students were Caucasian; one was Hispanic; one was African American. The eight students were considered to be on grade level in reading and did not receive any special services.

The group of students in the written retelling group consisted of four males and four females. Five of the students were Caucasian; two students were African American. All students in this group were considered to be on grade level and did not receive any special services.

### **Instrument**

The Houghton-Mifflin Legacy of Literacy series contained six themes comprised of fiction and informational text. There is a Content Link Assessment for each theme provided by Baltimore County Public Schools' Department of Elementary Programs. Each Content Link Assessment provided nine multiple-choice comprehension questions along with one Brief Constructed Response (BCR) based on the reading. The Content Link Assessment provided a scoring rubric for the Brief Constructed Response. Each multiple-choice question was worth 1 point and the BCR was worth 3 points providing a total value of 12 points. There is no reliability or validity data available for this instrument.

### **Procedure**

This researcher used a design that was very similar to the Schisler et al. (2010) study. Initially, the students read a non-fiction passage from the Houghton-Mifflin Legacy of Literacy Series and then completed the Baltimore County Public Schools' Content Link Assessment titled

“*El Nino*” before the two groups were formed. Students were then divided by gender and then randomly selected by choosing names out of a hat so as to have two groups that were fairly equivalent. One of these groups was randomly chosen to be the oral retell group and the other group was the written retell group. The pretest scores of the oral retell group (Mean = 7.13; SD = 3.18) did not differ significantly from the pretest scores of the written retell groups (Mean = 7.25; SD = 2.49) [ $t(14) = -.09, p > .05$ ] which confirmed that the groups did not differ significantly prior to the intervention.

For students in the oral retell group, this researcher introduced the oral retell strategy and explained that the students should orally read through the passage, and then retell as many important details that supported the main idea as they could remember in a three minute timed period. This researcher first modeled the strategy for the whole group by reading through a shorter passage and modeled how to use the oral retell strategy. Students then orally read the passages twice before practicing the oral retell strategy. Students were allowed to take as much time as they needed to reread the text. Students then worked with partners and took turns using the strategy while this researcher monitored the group of eight students. Students practiced using the oral retell strategy during three different sessions over three days within a week using other passages before they read the study passage and took the Content Link Assessment posttest. While students in the oral retell strategy group were instructed using the strategy, the written retell strategy group was engaged in another reading experience that was unrelated to the study. Students in this class were accustomed to working in small groups so there was no issue with distraction for the strategy group being taught.

During the second week, the two groups were switched and this researcher began providing instruction to the second group on how to use the written retell strategy when reading

informational text. This researcher again modeled reading the passage and then demonstrated how to complete a written retell on the informational passage the researcher had read. This researcher modeled how to write down the important details that supported the main idea of the text and demonstrated that this be completed in three minutes. Students then practiced reading the passages orally twice and then wrote down as many important details they could remember in three minutes. Students were asked to jot down notes or sentences about the details they remembered. Students in the written retell strategy group also practiced this strategy in three different sessions over three days using different passages before they read the study passage and took the Content Link Assessment.

After all students in the oral retell strategy group had been trained in their designated strategy during Week One, this researcher began to work with each student individually to have them complete the passages and tests for data collection. When students in the written retell strategy group completed their training in the designated strategy in Week Two, this researcher began to work with each student individually to have them complete the passages and tests for data collection.

The experimental conditions were repeated - reading with oral retell and repeated reading with written retell. In each condition, the wording of the directions was closely modeled on the Schisler et al. (2010) study. Students were first asked to read the passage orally and then to engage in a repeated reading of the same passage. Each experimental condition began by presenting the student with a reading passage and the following oral directions: "Please read the passage out loud to me. You have as much time as you need to finish so please do your best reading. If you come to a word you don't know, just try your best, and I will help you when necessary. You may begin." If the student made an oral error, it was recorded and this researcher

correctly pronounced the misread word and had the student reread the word and then continue to read the rest of the passage. This procedure was completed with every misread or omitted word. Immediately following the student's initial reading of the passage, this researcher provided the student with the following oral directions: "Please read this same passage out loud to me again. You have as much time as you need to finish, and I will be asking questions about what you have read, so please do your best reading. If you come to a word you don't know, just try your best, and I will help you when necessary. You may begin." If misread words occurred, this researcher again corrected the student and asked the student to reread the word and continue on with the rest of passage. After the student completed the repeated reading of the passage, this researcher instructed the student to either engage in an oral retell or a written retell of the passage. The time allotted for retell was 3 minutes. A stopwatch was used to keep track of the time. Following is a description of each of the strategies:

**Oral Retell Strategy:** After the student finished the repeated reading of the passage, the reading passage was removed from view and the following directions were given: "Now, please tell me all about what you have just read. You have 3 minutes to tell me all the important details you remember. I will tell you when your time is up. You may begin." At this time, a stopwatch was used to monitor the three-minute retelling time. The student was told to stop their retelling at the end of three minutes even if they were still telling the details of what they read. If the student stopped retelling before the three minute time, then this researcher asked the student once, "What else can you tell me about what you read?"

**Written Retell Strategy:** For the written retell condition, after the student completed the passage repeated reading, the passage was removed and the student was provided with white lined paper and a sharpened pencil. This researcher then provided the following oral directions:

“Now, please write down all the important details about what you have just read. You have 3 minutes to write down everything you remember. I will tell you when the time is up. You may begin.” The time allotted was three minutes to retell the passage in writing. After three minutes elapsed, this researcher instructed the student to stop and the paper and pencil were removed. If the student indicated that he/she was finished writing before the time elapsed, he/she was asked once, “What else can you write about what you read?” After the three-minute retelling period had elapsed, the student was immediately given the Baltimore County Content Link Assessment to complete independently. The Content Link Assessment included nine selected response questions from the informational text read and one Brief Constructed Response (BCR) question. An example of a selected response question from the passage might be, “Based on the information in this science article, which of the following causes El Nino?” Students picked from the following four choices: (a) Fish suddenly disappear from the water, (b) Many parts of the world experience weather disasters, (c) Ocean currents move from east to west across the Pacific, (d) Ocean currents shift and carry warm water in a different direction. An example of the brief constructed response question was “Summarize the wave effect of El Nino. Begin with this main idea sentence. The El Nino weather system acts like a wave in a bathtub.”

Prior to providing each student with the Content Link Assessment, the student was given the following oral instruction: “Now, you will respond to nine selected response questions about what you have just read along with one brief constructed response. Please try to do your best to respond to each question.”

While this researcher assessed each student in a quiet area, another teacher worked with the rest of class on another learning experience.

The scores of the two groups on the Content Link Assessments were compared using independent sample *t*-tests. The results of analysis are discussed in Chapter IV of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in reading comprehension scores among a group of fifth grade students using the oral retell strategy compared to students using the written retell strategy when reading informational text. Reading comprehension was assessed using the locally-developed Baltimore County Public Schools' Reading/Language Arts Content Link Assessments.

Table I below contains the mean reading comprehension scores on the Baltimore County Public Schools' Content Link Assessment as well as the results of statistical analysis.

**Table I**

**Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results of Student Performance on Baltimore County Content Link**

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>Oral</b>	8	9.00	1.07	-.32*
<b>Written</b>	8	9.25	1.91	

\*Non-significant at  $p > .05$

There were no significant differences in the mean Baltimore County Content Link Assessment scores between the oral retell group (Mean= 9.00, SD = 1.07) and the written retell group (Mean = 9.25 SD = 1.91) [ $t(14) = -.32, p > .05$ ]. Consequently, the null hypothesis that the reading comprehension score on the Baltimore County Public Schools' Content Link Assessment of the students receiving the oral retell intervention will not differ significantly from the performance of the students receiving the written retell strategy intervention failed to be rejected.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether reading comprehension performance of a group of fifth graders, as measured by the Baltimore County Content Link Assessments, differed significantly between those who used the oral retell strategy and those who used the written retell strategy. The null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the performance of fifth grade students using the oral retell strategy or the written retell strategy as determined by results from student performance on the Baltimore County Content Link Assessments failed to be rejected.

#### **Implications of the Results**

When reviewing the results of the study, there is no evidence as to whether or not oral or written retell strategies are more effective. Schisler et al.'s (2010) study indicated a possible reason why the oral retell group may have performed slightly better than the written retell group. It was noted in that study that students were able to recall more details orally, and that it took them a shorter amount of time to orally retell the important details of the text than it did to write them. This researcher noted some of the same observations as the students in the oral retell strategy group seemed to enjoy using their strategy more than the written retell strategy group. Students in the written retell strategy group seemed more reluctant to write down the details they had remembered whereas students in the oral retell strategy group seemed to have no hesitation with their oral responses. Teachers may want to consider which strategy is more time efficient or more agreeable to the students. Results also suggest that students could learn both strategies and then be given the choice as to which one they would prefer. Even though the results show that there was no significant difference in students' performance on the Baltimore County Content

Link Assessment, with increased use and practice of these reading strategies, student comprehension may show greater improvement over time.

This researcher also suggests that students develop their use of memory in retaining important information they have read. When students were asked to read the text two times before retelling the important information, this rereading seemed to help students remember more information about the text. Also noted was the extra effort students took in using memory skills since the text was removed before the important details were recalled. Teachers may consider how they might guide students to be more effective readers by having students reread all text two times before completing any responses from reading as this additional strategy seemed to help with better comprehension of text.

### **Threats to Validity**

This study did contain some threats to validity that require discussion. There were several threats to internal validity. First, only a small sample of students was used in each control group. Although a small sample group can provide meaningful data, a larger sample size would have provided greater statistical power and may have provided more valid results. Another limitation is the dependent variable that was used. If students' performance was measured using an essay type assessment, the outcome could have provided a different result as it may have been more sensitive to the effects of the intervention. Another limitation was the amount of instructional time given to each student prior to students taking the posttest. If students were to receive more opportunities for practicing the oral or written retell strategy, it could have possibly made a difference in their performance.

There were also threats to external validity. The outcome of this study could have also been different if the student population were comprised of students in grades two or three as

reading habits would not have been as well established as the reading habits of fifth graders. An additional limitation to this study is that this researcher did not have a control group that did not participate in either type of strategy. Without this control group, it is difficult to determine if the oral and written retell strategies made any impact on student performance. This researcher also could not generalize the results to the greater population due to the small sample size and the study being conducted on only average grade five reading students.

### **Connections to the Literature**

The results indicated that there was not any significant differences between the oral retell group and the written retell group. These findings are similar to a previous study performed by Schisler et al. (2010) as even though there was not any significant difference in results, students in the oral retell strategy group were found to be more efficient than the students in the written retell strategy group. The group of researchers' study differed in that the subjects were students who were considered struggling readers, whereas in this researcher's study, the subjects were considered average fifth-grade readers. This researcher's study also used informational text throughout the study whereas the Schisler et al. (2010) study used fictional text. Another difference between the two studies was that students were required to retell important details about the fictional story in the Schisler et al. (2010) study whereas in this researcher's study, the students were required to retell important details that supported the main idea of what was read. Since the current study varied in multiple ways from the Schisler et al. (2010) study (i.e., reading ability of subjects, type of text, information to be retold) but also did not find significant differences in the effectiveness of the strategies, it suggests that the lack of significant findings in the Schisler et al. (2010) study can be generalized to a wider population, text, and task characteristics.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Researchers should continue to investigate the use of oral and written retell strategies to improve reading comprehension of students in all elementary grades. Researchers should research such studies over a longer period of time and with varying populations, larger sample sizes, and a variety of texts. This would allow greater time for the students to become trained in the techniques and would also allow for measuring the improvement in comprehension skills over time as students become increasingly skilled with the technique. Researchers should also try using other dependent variables that might be more sensitive to the effects of the intervention. Researchers could also obtain additional information about the impact of the strategies on comprehending fiction and non-fiction texts. This would allow researchers to make greater generalizations about their findings.

### **Summary**

This study did not find that oral retelling and written retelling strategies differed in their effectiveness in helping students comprehend informational text. However, researcher observations suggest that both strategies are helpful for improving comprehension. Educators may want to select between the two strategies based on efficiency and student preferences. Future research should examine the effects of long-term implementation of these strategies and their impact on student comprehension and use a wider variety of subjects and texts. Providing educators with training on implementing retell strategies in their classrooms could lead students to greater success in improving reading comprehension. It is essential that researchers continue to study effective strategies for improving reading comprehension skills in our children so that all citizens will be literate and function well in our society.

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