



## EVIDENCE BASED INTERVENTION NETWORK EBI BRIEF

### Story Detective<sup>1</sup>

The story detective intervention involves the idea of turning the student into a “detective” when reading. Students make predictions about the story in combination with clues offered by the teacher or peer tutor. Story detective provides the opportunity for students to become active readers, regardless of individual reading levels. Students who would typically struggle with reading because of poor decoding skills are able to increase comprehension skills with the implementation of the Story Detective reading intervention.

#### **Theoretical Support**

The story detective intervention is supported by a great deal of theoretical evidence including the scaffolding model, zone of proximal development, and gradual release of responsibility model. First, scaffolding is a “process that enables a child ... to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Clark & Graves, 2004 p. 570). Scaffolding allows students to learn and understand tasks that they may not otherwise be able to learn. Students read to the best of their abilities, and when they come to a section in the reading that they do not understand, the teacher will fill in the gap by providing the assistance that the child needs, whether its word recognition or concept comprehension.

Story Detective is also based on the zone of proximal development, a theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky (1978) argued that every mental function in a child’s development first appears in partnership with an adult. Over time, the child proposed internalizes the process necessary to complete a task and eventually can perform them without the assistance of an adult.

Finally, the story detective intervention is based on the gradual release of responsibility model of Pearson and Fielding (1991). Pearson and Fielding argue that students progress from situations in which the teacher takes the majority of responsibility in completing reading tasks, to students completing the reading tasks independently. The Story Detective intervention begins with the teacher providing clues and leading discussions, to the students being able to engage in these activities independently.

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### Empirical Support

*Palinscar & Brown (1984)*. Twenty-four subjects were divided into four groups for this study. Group one received the reciprocal teaching intervention. Reciprocal teaching involves an adult teacher introducing a passage to students, with a brief discussion to trigger students' prior knowledge. Students read the passage silently, and then a student "teacher" asks a question, summarizes the paragraph and offers a prediction. Group two utilized the locating information intervention. Students are shown where in the text answers can be found. Group three read and answered the questions on daily passage assessments, but received no intervention, and group four participated only in pre- and posttests. Results demonstrated that most reading comprehension increased for students in the reciprocal teaching intervention. Reciprocal teaching is similar to story detective in that the teacher and peers aid the child in reading comprehension.

*Hansen & Pearson (1982)* Participants included 40 fourth-grade students divided into two groups: 20 good readers and 20 poor readers. Students participated in the intervention two days a week. The first day the teacher introduced the story, and the second day, students discussed the stories. The experimental group began discussion days with a conversation about how one's previous experiences help to understand what is being read. The authors hypothesized that the students would perform more successfully if the stories were associated with prior knowledge. After the discussion, students completed ten open-ended questions. This training session increased comprehension in poor readers in the experimental group. Like the study by Palinscar and Brown (1984), the study by Hansen and Pearson (1982) is supportive of story detective because it demonstrates the effectiveness of making meaning, for the child, out of a story, so that he or she will better understand it.

### Summary

Based on both theoretical and empirical evidence, story detective is a very effective method of teaching students to make meaning out of stories that they might not otherwise understand. Students become "detectives" when they read to build comprehension skills. The scaffolding model, zone of proximal development, and gradual release of responsibility model all demonstrate how and why story detective should be effective for students. Additionally, research by Palinscar and Brown (1984) and Hansen and Pearson (1982) support the fact that interventions similar to story detective are effective in increasing reading comprehension, so story detective should be as well.



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### References

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