Inference making ability and its relation to comprehension failure in young children.

In this article, Cain and Oakhill (1999) examined young children’s reading comprehension skill and how their comprehension skill is associated to their ability to draw inferences. The purpose of the study is to investigate the possible sources of inferential and reading comprehension failures. Oakhill’s early studies found that less skilled readers tend to experience specific difficulties when they have to make two types of inferences that are necessary to construct a coherent and integrated representation of the text.

For Cain and Oakhill’s (1999) study, there were three groups tested, same-aged skilled “comprehenders”, less skilled “comprehenders”, and a comprehension-age match group. The participants are children from the ages of 7-8 in British Junior School and were tested using the *Gates-MacGinitie Primary Two Vocabulary Test*. For the match group the children were match for reading accuracy, sight vocabulary, and chronological age. There were four experimental stories with appropriate vocabulary. All the children read each story and then made to answer six questions immediately after reading. Four of the questions require inference to be able to be answered correctly, because the questions require text-connecting and gap filling.

The study found a pattern that suggest that the skill in drawing inference may be a plausible cause for comprehension failure rather than inference being a failure due to poor comprehension. It would also seem that failure to make inference is not due to the lack of relevant general knowledge. They found that skilled comprehenders were better at both types of inference than less skilled comprehenders. This supports previous findings of relation of comprehension and inferential skills in children. Cain and Oakhill’s (1999) findings also suggested that the differences in reading strategy are a likely source for the group differences.