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Abstract

It is reasonable to assume that today's college literacy instruction addresses a variety of strategies for classroom reading instruction with preservice teachers. This paper describes the classroom practices of 92 K-12 beginning teachers with five or fewer years of teaching experience. We surveyed these 92 teachers relative to their knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies; their sources of information regarding reading strategies, and their confidences and concerns about preparing lessons.

"Teachers play a critical role in helping students to learn with text." (Vacca & Vacca, 1996, p. 3) Therefore, it is important to understand the practices and needs of today's beginning teachers relative to their teaching content. To do this, it is necessary to describe the practices of beginning teachers who have completed college reading methods courses and entered their own classrooms. Do they use the reading strategies discussed in these methods courses and in their reading methods textbooks? What do these beginning teachers still want to know about content reading strategies?

This study describes reading strategies that beginning teachers know, use, and want to learn; their sources of knowledge regarding these strategies; and their confidences and concerns in preparing lessons. For the purpose of this study, participants are defined as teachers having five or fewer years of teaching experience.

During the last 20 years, reading educators have moved from teaching reading as a transmission process, where reading is thought of as a skill used for the purpose of transmitting knowledge from text to passive reader, to a construction or process model involving the active participation of the reader (Kamil, 1984, Ruddell & Unrau, 1994). Because the concept of the active reader has become central to this model, it becomes necessary to describe the cognitive processes of reading that eventually evolve into schema theory and motivational factors internal to the reader (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The proportion of research studies with a dominant focus on interactive and transactive cognitive processes grew from 51% to 70% from 1975 to 1984 (Crismore, 1985). This shift in emphasis is significant for the profession. In addition to all of its other educational implications, this shift supports the notion that instructional strategies which actively engage the student in reading are important for comprehension and have a place in the content area classroom.

Reading professionals have come to view the inclusion of numerous comprehension strategies as essential for best practice.

This means that any credible model for the genuine refreshment of American schools had better start with a solid

plan for teaching reading. Although the field of reading certainly has been subject to its own passionate internal controversies over the years, the basic professional consensus about state-of-the-art reading instruction is stronger and clearer then ever today. Reading is no longer such a mystery: the experts now understand quite well how it works and agree, at least 95 percent, about how to teach it to the vast majority of children. (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998, p. 27)

In discussing the "qualities of best practice in teaching reading," Zemelman, et al., (1998), state, *"reading is a process.* Reading is a meaning-making process: an active, constructive, creative, higher-order thinking activity that involves distinctive cognitive strategies before, during, and after reading" (p. 30). Some of these strategies include the following: What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL), Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), Language Experience Approach (LEA), webbing/mapping, ReQuest, journaling, Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R), Guided Reading Procedure (GRP), outlining, and study guides.

All of these strategies emphasize the importance of active student engagement with text. The KWL (Carr & Ogle, 1987) is designed to activate prior knowledge and to help children formulate questions and focus on getting the answers to their own questions. The DRTA, like the KWL, activates prior knowledge and encourages students' interaction and can be used for both efferent and aesthetic reading (Haggard, 1985, 1989). It involves prediction, verification, judgment and extension of ideas. LEA emphasizes the use of children's personalized stories and meaningful text in order to activate prior knowledge. Webbing, sometimes called mapping, encourages students to create a logical visual representation of relationships. ReQuest, or re-questioning between students and/or students and teacher (Manzo, 1969), helps students develop the ability to create questions, build comprehension, and monitor their own learning. The SQ3R (Robinson, 1946) is a study system, sometimes taught as a formula, designed to help students approach text in a structured way. GRP emphasizes close reading and the organization of facts around important ideas in an attempt to accurately understand the

author's intended meaning and to develop a common reference from which to draw implications (Manzo & Manzo, 1990).

Durkin (1979, 1974-75) studied the amount of time spent and the types of comprehension activities found in reading classes. She found that once elementary school students were able to read, teachers spent most of the reading period assigning students selections to read with testing afterwards to assess comprehension. While most teachers indicated that they valued and included comprehension instruction, they predominantly used literal and teacher generated questions, assigning and checking of practice sheets often in workbooks and on ditto sheets with the emphasis on the literal or the rote. Durkin suggested that testing for literal understanding and teaching children to "construct" meaning are different. She observed little instruction of "deeper" comprehension strategies. Although her findings brought criticism to the profession and prompted some classroom intervention studies (Pearson & Dole, 1987), nevertheless there still seemed to be a disparity between what research would indicate was good practice and what was actually occurring.

Pressley, Gaskins, Wile, Cunicelli, & Sheridan (1991) studied strategy instruction at Benchmark School (Media, PA) where teaching focused on the coordinated use of strategies and where flexible and adaptive use of cognitive strategies was a long-term commitment of the program. Some of the conclusions reached by Pressley et al. from studies at Benchmark offering effective strategy instruction follow:

1. Such teaching is long term.
2. Explanations and teacher modeling of one or more strategies occurs in every class.
3. Teacher guidance is the most prominent mode of instruction.
4. Teachers discuss, endorse, and model flexible strategy use.
5. Acquisition of repertoires of effective and complementary strategies is the ideal.
6. Teachers consistently send the message that thought processes are what count rather than getting a specific "correct" answer.
7. Strategies instruction is integrated with content instruction. (1991, p. 226)

Over twenty years after Durkin's (1979) study and nine years after Pressley et al. (1991), we surveyed beginning teachers to describe their classroom practices relative to content area reading strategies.

METHOD

Purpose

This study is a descriptive analysis of 92 beginning K-12 public school teachers':

- knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies;
- sources of information regarding reading strategies; and
- concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Participants

Ninety-two teachers, with one to five years of experience, who teach in one southeastern and two midwestern American states responded to a written survey administered during faculty meetings. School district size ranged from less than 500 students to more than 10,000 with 45 percent in the 1000-5000 range.

Respondents included the following distribution of classroom teachers: grades K-3, (8 percent); grades 4-6, (13 percent); grades 7-9, (39 percent); and grades 10-12, (40 percent). Forty percent of the teachers had bachelors degrees; 28 percent, bachelors degree plus; 19 percent, a masters degree; 12 percent, a masters plus; and 1 percent, a doctorate.

When asked to respond to the statement, "The last post-baccalaureate course that I took was...." the following results were obtained: 42 indicated that they had taken a course within the last 12 months; 30 from one to three years ago, and 13 from four to six years ago. Seven did not respond.

Description of the Measure

Multiple choice survey questions were designed to elicit quantitative data about these K-12 classroom teachers and their practices related to content reading strategies, sources of information about these strategies, and their confidences and concerns in preparing lessons. The written survey, included in the Appendix, was administered by the researcher/authors or by educators whom we selected. Surveys were distributed, completed, and collected at faculty meetings; all response sheets were computer scored.

Ten reading related strategies used in the survey were taken from professional reading journals and 17 college level reading methods textbooks published within the past five years. Items included: What I Know, Want to Know, Have Learned (KWL); Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA); Language Experience Approach (LEA); webbing/mapping; ReQuest; journals/logs; Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R); Guided Reading Procedure (GRP); outlining; and study guides. In the survey, the full names of the strategies rather than abbreviations are used.

Frequency distributions depict the number of times each score was obtained (McMillan, 1996). Results of this survey are presented in frequency tables. A comparison of results provides insight into actual classroom teachers' practices relative to content reading strategies.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to describe to what extent beginning teachers use content reading strategies to actively engage students with text to build reading comprehension. Responses by 92 K-12 classroom teachers to survey questions described their (1) knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies, (2) sources of information regarding reading strategies, and (3) concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Familiarity with, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies

These findings describe the strategies being used in classrooms in comparison to the strategies with which teachers say they are familiar. Three of the written prompts on the survey follow.

"I am **familiar** with the following strategies: (Mark as many as may apply.)"

"I **use** the following strategies: (Mark as many as may apply.)"

"I would be **interested in** learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply.)

Results of participants' responses are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Responses for Familiarity, Use, and Interest in Learning

Strategy	Familiar With	Actually Use	Interested In
KWL	40.2%	28.3%	34.8%
DRTA	48.9%	37%	38%
LEA	35.9%	20.7%	32.6%
Webbing	59.8%	48.9%	18.5%
ReQuest	14.1%	5.4%	53.3%
Journals/ Logs	67.4%	39.1%	16.3%
SQ3R	58.7%	20.7%	40.2%
GRP	33.7%	14.1%	40.2%
Outline	71.7%	35.9%	30.4%
Study Guides	75%	52.2%	22.8%

Sources of Information

In response to the prompt "I am familiar with these strategies because of," with the exception of three teachers who did not respond, the beginning teachers indicated the following:

Table 2. How Teachers Became Familiar with Strategies (N=92)

In-service provided by my school district	9.8%
Workshop I attended because I was sent by my school district	7.6%
Workshop that I attended on my own	4.3%
University course in reading/language arts	69.5%
Reading about them in professional journals and magazines related to teaching	6.5%

Confidences and Concerns

When asked "In preparing lessons, I am most confident about," teachers responded as follows:

Table 3. Most Confident About When Planning Lessons (N=92)

My personal knowledge of content	40.2%
Motivating students	20.7%
Having access to suitable materials	6.5%
Developing activities that involve and interest students	19.6%
Meeting curricular expectations	13%

When asked, "In preparing lessons, my greatest concern is," the teachers responded:

Table 4. Least Confident About When Planning Lessons (N=92)

My personal knowledge of the content areas	6.5%
Motivating students	34.7%
Having access to suitable materials	14.1%
Developing activities that involve and interest students	28.2%
Meeting curricular expectations	17.4%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to describe to what extent beginning teachers use content reading strategies to actively engage students with text to build reading comprehension. Responses by 92 K-12 classroom teachers to survey questions described their (1) knowledge of, use of, and interest in learning content reading strategies, (2) sources of information regarding reading strategies, and (3) concerns and confidences about preparing lessons.

Results indicate that many beginning teachers are not familiar with these surveyed strategies. Of those who are familiar with these strategies, in many cases, less than half actually use them. This indicates a discrepancy between knowledge of strategies and actual classroom practice. The mean of 47 for familiarity with strategies when compared with the mean of 28 for actual use of strategies indicates that what beginning teachers have knowledge of and what they use in their classrooms differ. What are some reasons for the existence of this gap?

Familiarity with strategies (Table 1) varied from 75 percent for study guides to 14 percent for ReQuest. Frequency of use varied from a

high of 52 percent for study guides to five percent for ReQuest. The two strategies with which teachers are most familiar, study guides and outlining, are strategies which they probably have used during their own K-12 and college education to learn content. Prior personal experience with using reading strategies as a student may affect teaching practices. Therefore, if a teacher is not accustomed to using a strategy, it is not likely to become a part of his/her classroom practices. Further study should investigate the role that prior experience with using reading strategies as a student at the K-12 or college levels plays in individual teaching practices.

Additionally, sizable numbers of these beginning teachers state that they are interested in learning how to use these strategies in their classrooms. Of these, about 70 percent (Table 2) of these beginning teachers indicate that they are familiar with reading strategies because of college/university reading/language arts classes, and 45 percent of the beginning teachers have taken a college/university class within the last year. The gap that exists between reading/language arts methods course instruction and subsequent K-12 classroom practice will need to be narrowed or closed if strategy-based instruction is to be used to build reading comprehension in the content area classroom.

While 40 percent of these beginning teachers expressed confidence in their personal knowledge of content, their concerns focused on developing activities that involve and interest students, 28 percent, and motivating students, 35 percent (Tables 3 & 4). Therefore, the use of content reading strategies in combination with the teachers' knowledge of content would help to address these concerns. Connecting concepts to be taught to students' prior knowledge and interactive learning through the use of various reading strategies could serve to develop interest in content to be taught and serve as motivating factors for learning. Content reading strategies have been shown to actively engage students with content through active involvement and connection with prior knowledge and interests. "Active, engaged learners are strategic in their interactions with a text." (Vacca & Vacca, 1996, p. xvi)

The results of this study indicate that reading educators and schools of education (for preservice teachers) and that school districts (for

practicing teachers) should facilitate the process of moving teachers from "familiar with" to implementers of content reading strategies. This would help to actively engage K-12 students in learning and thus promote the development of reading comprehension. Teachers need opportunities to internalize the connection between strategy use and the construction of meaning through teacher modeling and student use of reading strategies that facilitate learning in the content areas. Teachers must feel confident about modeling and monitoring student use of strategies in their classrooms. Change might begin at the preservice level taking the form of:

- offering more reading methods courses over the course of the undergraduate students' college program;

- establishing reading practicum where students are required to model and implement reading strategies in real classroom settings;

- providing mentoring opportunities in K-12 settings;

- actively supporting professional reading organizations;

- working with school/government administrators to promote ongoing reading support programs with college/universities;

- involving parents in providing support and reinforcement for student use of content reading strategies.

Isolated professional development presentations, which lack ongoing support for implementation of strategies presented, are not the answer. Preservice and practicing teachers need opportunities to personally construct their knowledge of content reading strategies and to realize their impact on reading comprehension resulting in active, involved student learning. This personal construction of meaning might narrow the gap between knowledge of and use of strategies, and address the greatest concerns of beginning teachers when planning lessons.

Further study should consider that surveys as a self-reporting instrument were used for this investigation. Future research could

incorporate classroom observations and structured interviews with teachers in addition to the surveys in order to describe content reading practices of beginning teachers in more depth.

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Appendix
Survey Questions

1. In the district in which I teach the student population K-12 is
   a. Less than 500
   b. 500-1000
   c. 1000-5000
   d. 5000-10,000
   e. More than 10,000

2. I teach
   a. K-3
   b. Grade 4-6
   c. Grade 7-9
   d. Grade 10-12

3. The highest degree which I obtained is a
   a. Bachelors
   b. Bachelors plus
   c. Masters
   d. Masters plus
   e. Doctorate

4. The last post-baccalaureate course that I took was
   a. Within the last 12 months
   b. 1-3 years ago
   c. 4-6 years ago
   d. 7-10 years ago
   e. 10 or more years ago

5. I am familiar with the following content reading strategies: (Mark as many as may apply).

   a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
   b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
   c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
   d. Webbing/mapping
   e. ReQuest

6. I am also familiar with the following content reading strategies: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. Journals/logs
    b. Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
    c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
    d. Outlining
    e. Study guides

7. I am familiar with these content reading strategies because of
    a. In-service provided by my school district.
    b. A workshop that I attended because I was sent by my school district.
    c. A workshop that I attended on my own.
    d. A university course in reading/language arts.
    e. Reading about them in professional journals and magazines related to teaching.

8. I use the following content reading strategies and find them to be effective: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
    b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
    c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
    d. Webbing/mapping
    e. ReQuest

9. I also use the following content reading strategies and find them to be effective: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. Journals/logs
    b   Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
    c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
    d. Outlining
    e. Study guides

10. I would be interested in learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. What I Know, What I Want to Know, What I Learned (KWL)
    b. Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)
    c. Language Experience Approach (LEA)
    d. Webbing/mapping
    e. ReQuest

11. I also would be interested in learning how to use the following content reading strategies in my classroom: (Mark as many as may apply).

    a. Journals/logs
    b. Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R)
    c. Guided Reading Procedure (GRP)
    d. Outlining
    e. Study guides

12. In preparing lessons I am most confident about which one of the following:

    a. My personal knowledge of the content area(s).
    b. Motivating students.
    c. Having access to suitable materials.
    d. Developing activities that involve and interest students.
    e. Meeting curricular expectations.

13. In preparing lessons I am least confident about which one of the following:

    a. My personal knowledge of the content area (s).
    b. Motivating students.
    c. Having access to suitable materials.
    d. Developing activities that involve and interest students.
    e. Meeting curricular expectations.