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READING STRATEGIES IN THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF MATERIALS

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It seems safe to assume that all agree—the answer to the question "What is the major purpose of reading?" is, of course, "Comprehension." The next question, "What is comprehension?" is not so easily answered. Many books and articles are directed to this question, but there is and probably will never be a single clear-cut answer.

One effective way of viewing comprehension was described by Cunningham, Cunningham, and Arthur (1982). They compared comprehension to the construction of a building. Their analogy follows:

A writer	Architect
Text	Building Plan/Blueprint
Reader	Construction Company
Comprehension	Construction
Understanding	Completed Building
Schema	Job Description
Teacher	Construction Consultant

Langer (1982) tells us that for efficient text processing and successful comprehension to take place, a link with some already acquired knowledge is necessary.

The major determinant of a text's comprehensibility, according to Adams and Bruce, is the goodness of match between the knowledge the author has presumed of the reader and that actually possessed by the reader.

The statement that interest is as potent a factor in comprehension as is difficulty was made by Estes and Vaughan (1973). The authors go on to say that although students must read in non-interest areas in school, the teacher's expectancy cannot be as high with this material, and the teacher must guide the reader more carefully.

Despite the fact that reading teachers are aware that reading in the content areas is likely to be more difficult for children than reading something for enjoyment, not all of these educators spend the time necessary for bridging the gap between the reader's background knowledge and the material s/he is being asked to read.

The study reported here was conducted in order to determine whether or not children did exhibit more effective strategies when reading a trade book than they did when reading either a basal reader or a content area text. Although the study uses only three persons at three different grade levels in three different types of material, it constitutes an initial step in determining if, indeed, children read material from a trade book more effectively than they read material from a basal reader or a content text.

Subjects and Procedures

The three subjects in this study, a second grade girl, a fourth grade boy, and a seventh grade girl, were all from the same family. Based on their academic performance in school, all three were judged to be of average or above average intelligence.

Passages were selected from a trade book, a basal reader, and a science text book. A miscue passage and a cloze passage were developed from each source. The passages from the basal reader were administered first, those from the trade books second, and those from the content area textbooks third.

The Fry Readability Graph was used to determine readability of each of these passages. According to the criteria used in this procedure, the passages were either at the same grade level across the three types of material or within one grade level of difficulty.

Both oral reading on the miscue passages and silent reading on the cloze passages were provided for. In analyzing the cloze passages, criteria used in miscue analysis were applied in that the word supplied and that of the text were examined for correction, for grammatical acceptability, for semantic acceptability, and for meaning change.

It was hypothesized that the readers at each grade level would use the best reading strategies in reading the passage from the trade book, and that the least effective strategies would be used on the passage from the content area textbook.

Findings Reading Performance in Different Types of Material

Type of Passage	Highly Effective Strategies			Moderately Effective Strategies			Some Effective Strategies			Ineffective Strategies			Grade Level
	Tr.	Ba.	Co.	Tr.	Ba.	Co.	Tr.	Ba.	Co.	Tr.	Ba.	Co.	
Miscue				X	X							X	2
Cloze				X	X				X				2
Miscue		X		X								X	4
Cloze				X	X	X							4
Miscue	X	X							X				7
Cloze		X		X					X				7

Tr. = Trade Book

Ba. = Basal Reader

Co. = Content Textbook

Although the second grade reader used moderately effective strategies on both passages in the trade book and the basal reader, there were variations in her performance on the content passages. Ineffective strategies on the miscue passage were exhibited, while some effective strategies were used on the cloze passage.

A wider range of strategies was used at the fourth grade level. The highly effective strategies were used in the basal miscue passage. There was no difference in the passages in the basal reader, trade book, and content text cloze passages; all moderately effective strategies. The oral performance was good on the content miscue passage, but the reader's comprehension was very poor. He was unable to supply any generalizations, very few specifics or major concepts; therefore, he placed in the ineffective strategies category.

Highly effective strategies were used by the seventh grade reader for the cloze passage in the basal reader and trade book, as well as for the miscue passage in the trade book. Moderately effective strategies for the cloze passage in the trade book were used. Some effective strategies were used in both content passages.

While the students did tend to use the most ineffective strategies in the content text, they did not use the highest strategies in the trade book passages. The hypothesis, thus, was rejected.

Only one of the six possible ratings on the trade book passages was in the highly effective range. This was accomplished by the seventh grade student. Three of the six ratings on the basal passages were highly effective. Two of these were achieved by the seventh grade reader, and one by the fourth grade student.

Five of the six ratings on the trade book passages fell under the moderately effective strategies category. Two of these were employed by the second grade student, two by the fourth grader, and one by the seventh grader. Three basal reader passages were also in this category, two from the second grade student and one from the fourth grade student. Only one content passages was in this category. That was the cloze passage read by the fourth grader.

In the ineffective strategies, one miscue passage was recorded at second grade level, another at the fourth grade level.

Limitations

The order of administration of the passages may have had something to do with the students' performances. Since the basal reader passages were administered first, this may have been a contributing factor to the best performance in this type of material. Content passages were administered last, and students may have been tired of the procedure by this time, and their poorer performance could have been as a result of that.

Additionally, to obtain the desired length for the miscue passages in the content area, it was necessary at the lower levels to include topics with several subheadings. Thus, the material did not have quite the uninterrupted continuity found in the passages in the other two types of material.

Lack of interest in the content area topics could have been another factor contributing to the lower performance exhibited in this area.

Conclusions

In this admittedly small sample, there is evidence that the reading of content area material is done less effectively than is the reading of basal readers or of trade books. This is particularly evident at the lower grade levels.

Suggestions for Further Research

A larger sample of students at each grade level should be used. The pattern of completing the passages should be varied to lessen the possibility that the order of administration might influence the performance.

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