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COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION FOR ELEMENTARY LEARNERS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL LITERACY TEXTS

Dr. Margie Garcia, Dr. Mary Beth Sampson, Dr. Wayne Linek

Abstract

This study examined how reading comprehension was addressed in literacy texts used with preservice teachers at five universities in the southwestern United States. Universities were selected based on the highest number of graduates receiving their initial Early Childhood through 4th grade (EC-4) teaching certificates. An introductory Reading course was selected from each university. A total of 11 required textbooks were examined for definitions of reading comprehension, the presence of reading instructional incidents (RIIs), and reading comprehension instructional incidents (RCIIs). Overall, more RIIs (reading instruction) than RCIIs (reading instruction related to comprehension) were found.

Introduction

The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing (Harris & Hodges, 1995) defines reading comprehension as “a process in which the reader constructs meaning interacting with text . . . through a combination of prior knowledge and previous experience” (p. 39). In general terms, reading comprehension is thought of as the progression of extracting and creating meaning from text (Conner, Morrison, & Petrella, 2004; Durkin, 1993; Pressley, 1998, 2000) or the ability to learn from text (Snow, 2001, 2004).

Within the context of reading instruction, many theorists, researchers, and teacher practitioners concur that without comprehension, there is no meaning, and therefore, without meaning, no learning can take place. Readers learn to construct meaning as they broaden their knowledge base and understand what they read (Anderson, 2004; August & Hakuta, 1998; Cohen, 2007; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Most importantly, time spent immersed in actual reading of text is critical in order to build a strong foundation for future learning (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, [NICHD], 2000; RAND, 2004).

Studies have shown that effective reading comprehension instruction is an essential component for all learners because of the significant repercussions of reading as a life-long skill (Conner et al., 2004). Yet according to the National Reading Panel (NRP) Summary Report (NICHD, 2000) many children are falling short in the area of reading comprehension. The NRP Report asserts that comprehension can be improved when students are explicitly taught to use specific cognitive strategies or to think critically when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how reading comprehension was addressed in professional literacy texts used to teach elementary preservice teachers. This was done using a content-analysis method. In addition, the texts were examined to determine the frequency of reading instructional incidents (RIIs) and the categories and frequencies of reading comprehension instructional incidents (RCIIs). For the purpose of this study, RIIs were defined as directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions of reading instruction that were found within a professional literacy text. RCIIs were directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions of reading comprehension that were found within a professional

literacy text that can be used to engage students in developing, enhancing, improving, increasing, and/or supporting reading comprehension.

The primary researcher examined 11 professional literacy texts used in an introductory Reading course at five universities in the southwestern United States. The universities were chosen based on the number of graduates from their traditional teacher- education programs. These graduates received their initial EC-4 Generalist certification from September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008 (State Board for Educator Certification [SBEC], 2008).

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. How and with what frequency was reading comprehension defined in professional literacy texts used in introductory Reading courses?
2. What were the frequency and percentage of the RIIs and RCIIIs found in professional literacy texts used in the introductory Reading courses?
3. What categories emerged from the RCIIIs found in professional literacy texts used in the introductory Reading courses and what was the frequency and percentage of each category?

Review of Related Literature

Research has supported that comprehension instruction should be a fundamental component of classrooms across the country. Since the essence of reading comprehension (what students understand) and effective reading instruction (what teachers should do to help students understand) are intertwined, it is critical that teachers be knowledgeable and flexible in order to meet the needs of their students (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2004; Pressley, 2000; RAND, 2004). Professional literacy texts are a venue for teachers to gain information about comprehension instruction. These texts are used in many university teacher-preparation programs (Pomerantz & Pierce, 2004).

Therefore, a content-analysis method was used to examine professional literacy texts used in introductory Reading courses for EC-4 preservice teachers to determine how reading comprehension was defined. In addition, the content analysis determined categories and frequencies of reading comprehension instructional incidents (RCIIIs) which were documented. For the purpose of this

study, RCIIIs were operationalized as examples, directions, and explanations of comprehension instruction.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this research study was constructed around the theoretical framework which was divided into three sections: (a) Reading Comprehension, (b) Reading Comprehension Instruction, and (c) Professional Literacy Texts for Preservice Teachers.

Reading Comprehension

Just what is reading comprehension and what does it mean? Reading comprehension has been defined in a multitude of ways. The National Reading Panel viewed reading as a process. Beginning in the 1970s, reading comprehension was recognized as an active process that engaged the reader instead of a passive activity (NICHD, 2000). Reading was viewed as an interactive process between the reader and the text through which meaning was constructed, but importantly, it was also seen as an intentional thinking process (Durkin, 1993). The RAND group (2001) defined reading comprehension as “The process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2001, p. 11).

Additionally, Anderson and Pearson (1984) stressed that reading could not occur without comprehension, and, in doing so, the reader constructed meaning by interacting with the text. Still others including Fielding and Pearson (1994) maintained that while reading comprehension was once thought of only in terms of decoding, the notion that it was much more complex and combined knowledge, experience, thinking, and teaching was more readily accepted. They concurred that in order to be effective, comprehension must include three elements which were (a) the reader, (b) the text, and (c) the activity. The reader, defined as the person who was doing the comprehending, the text as what was being comprehended, and the activity was the vehicle for the comprehension to take place (RAND, 2004).

Historical perspectives of reading comprehension.

The history of reading comprehension has run the gamut from oral reading to silent reading, from hornbooks and primers to basals and scripted curriculum (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2004; Venezky, 1984). Prior to the 1970s, reading comprehension instruction was geared toward teaching specific skills for students

to practice and master. This included skills focusing on comprehension such as identifying the main idea or distinguishing fact from opinion (NICHHD, 2000).

Reading is a far more complex process than had been previously envisioned by early reading researchers, but most importantly it was perceived merely as a set of skills to be mastered (NICHHD, 2000). These early pioneers of reading research believed that by mastering skills such as the differentiation between fact and opinion or identifying the main idea of a story, the reader would systematically build toward the capacity to comprehend. This way of thinking mistakenly gave the reader and the teacher false confidence that comprehension had actually occurred. The opposite may in fact be true because readers were passive recipients, and true meaning only existed through interactions with the text (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

Louise Rosenblatt challenged the concept that reading was merely a set of skills to be learned and emphasized that reading was an interactive process, a “transaction” of sorts between the reader and the text. She referred to this as a “poem.” She stressed that readers must interact with the text and reflect on what they read in order for successful comprehension to occur (Rosenblatt, 2004). Rosenblatt took this a step further by asserting that there are two types of stances readers take when having a meaningful interaction with the text. The efferent stance occurred when the reader was looking for information or facts to absorb, as in a non-fiction text. The aesthetic stance took place when the reader had a more emotional connection with the text (1978).

Durkin’s (1979) landmark study revealed that classroom teachers were talking about comprehension, but there was little, if any, explicit comprehension instruction taking place. Furthermore, this type of methodical instruction was followed by what Durkin termed “mentioning, practicing, and assessing.” Teachers mentioned a particular comprehension skill that students were to apply such as identifying a cause and effect relationship. Durkin’s own words paint the true picture of what was actually going on in the classroom: “Mentioning is saying just enough about a topic to allow for an assignment related to it” (Durkin, 1981, p. 453).

Next, students were expected to practice the aforementioned skill by working on a number of workbook pages, and last, the teacher assessed their work to determine if they had understood and used the skill correctly. Durkin’s conclusions were that this type of instruction did little to aid in students’ comprehension because students were assessed on what they understood, but they were not being taught to comprehend text.

Following Durkin's (1979) pivotal study, several researchers in the literacy field decided to look further and examine what constituted effective comprehension instruction. Durkin's research paved the way for other prominent researchers to explore reading comprehension to see if any progress had been made (Dole et al., 1991; Pressley, 1998, 2000).

Findings from the classroom research from the 1970s and 1980s supported Durkin's study which revealed that children were spending a small amount of time actually reading texts. Fielding and Pearson (1994) asserted that this interaction with authentic text was a critical piece of reading comprehension instruction because it gave students the opportunity to practice skills that were essential to reading, including comprehension. Moreover, since reading helps to build background knowledge, this aided in the comprehension process as well.

Rand and The National Reading Panel.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was assembled in 1997 when Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to organize a national panel on reading (NICHD, 2000). The purpose of the panel was to assess the nationwide status of reading, including the assortment of approaches to teaching children to read and to rate their effectiveness.

The NRP was made up of 14 people, including leading authorities in the field of reading research, representatives of colleges of education, teachers, educational administrators, and parents. Furthermore, the panel took the previous research of the National Research Council (NRC) into consideration and built upon their efforts (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The NRP examined the five components of effective reading instruction, namely: (a) Phonemic Awareness, (b) Phonics, (c) Fluency, (d) Comprehension, and (e) Vocabulary (NICHD, 2000). Although all five areas are critical to the successful implementation of reading instruction, this literature review focused solely on the area of comprehension.

The NRP met over a period of two years to discuss their findings, and the results were documented in two reports titled Report of the National Reading Panel and the Report of the National Reading Panel: Reports of the Subgroups (NICHD, 2000). Given that reading was a crucial factor not only in academic content areas but as a lifelong skill, the NRP's findings after analyzing extensive reading comprehension research suggested that there were three common themes. These included (a) The process of reading comprehension is cognitive and cannot exist without vocabulary instruction, (b) Reading comprehension requires a

purposeful interaction between the reader and text, and (c) Quality teachers must be able to provide effective comprehension instruction, which is directly linked to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sykes, 1999).

Additionally, the NRP recommended eight comprehension strategies with which to build a strong foundation of reading comprehension instruction: (a) Comprehension Monitoring, (b) Cooperative Learning, (c) Graphic Organizers, (d) Answering Questions, (e) Generating Questions, (f) Story and Text Structure, (g) Summarizing, and (h) Multiple Strategy Instruction (NICHD, 2000).

Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction

With differing beliefs and opinions regarding reading comprehension, additional research was necessary in order to determine what constituted effective comprehension instruction. While research supported the necessity for effective classroom instruction, it was vital to examine what had been identified as effective.

Research has consistently documented that effective classroom instruction is a significant contributor to the development of comprehension skills for children (Aarnoutse, Van Leeuwe, Voeten, & Oud, 2001; Conner et al., 2004). In order for students to develop comprehension proficiency, effective instructional support was essential. Teachers who successfully implemented and exemplified methods of reading comprehension that engaged students “for the purpose of advancing thoughtful, competent, and motivated reading” (RAND, 2004, p. 721) are a fundamental part of this process.

Conner et al. (2004) examined the growth of reading comprehension skills of 3rd graders. The degree of the impact instruction had on the students was also observed along with the language and reading skills children brought to the classroom. Results indicated that the growth of reading comprehension was largely dependent upon the reading abilities the students had already acquired. For example, students whose language skills were strong at the beginning of the year achieved higher reading comprehension growth with less teacher explicit instruction. By contrast, students whose reading level and skills were below average at the beginning of the school year attained greater comprehension growth with more teacher interaction coupled with explicit instruction.

Best Practices

One method of accomplishing the goal of making text comprehensible for the elementary student is through the use of “best practices.” Best practice in the

area of literacy instruction was defined as, “solid, reputable, state-of-the-art work in a field” (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005, p. vi). The term “best practice” was borrowed from other professions including engineering, law, and medicine because no such term existed in the area of education. Best practice has also been distinguished by engaging and meaningful literacy activities which give students what they need in order to become proficient and motivated learners (Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2003).

Research has consistently documented that effective reading comprehension instruction was a key ingredient for all students (Pressley, 2000). Therefore, it was necessary to determine how teachers were being prepared to teach comprehension.

Connecting Theory to Practice

Research leads practice, and teacher educators can learn to be more effective by staying current on literacy research and textbooks that offered support and insight into preparing preservice teachers for the classroom (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000). Because students’ needs can vary from class to class and year to year, researchers and practitioners have concurred that it is imperative that teacher educators expose preservice teachers to numerous ways literacy can be implemented with all students (Gaffney & Anderson, 2000; Hord, Rutherford, Huling, & Hall, 2004; Schlechty, 2002; Schmoker, 2006). In addition, preservice teachers must also be taught to understand and implement differentiated instruction so that all students can learn. Effective teaching comes from the knowledge that teachers possess regarding how students learn best (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Professional Literacy Texts for Preservice Teachers

Research has validated that in order for teachers to be effective facilitators of instruction for all students, they must be knowledgeable, not only in what they teach, but also how children learn best (Cunningham & Allington, 2003; Reutzel & Cooter, 2008; Sampson, Rasinski, & Sampson., 2003). Therefore, it is important for preservice teachers to have access to numerous ways to implement literacy instruction and reading comprehension strategies.

Ultimately, the goal of reading research was for the students’ comprehension abilities to improvement. There were two factors which impacted this process. The first issue was that reading research should detail how instruction must be implemented and second, teachers must be willing to implement that instruction (Dole et al., 1991). Even if quality research dictated changes in instruction, if

teachers do not use what they learn to perfect their instructional practices, their students' reading comprehension proficiency will not improve (RAND, 2004). Teachers must have ownership and the all important "buy in" in order to fully embrace changes being made. For those who are dedicated to furthering educational research, it would be reassuring to know that their scientific-based practices would not have been in vain (Sykes, 1999).

Pressley and El-Dinary (1997) found that there was a large body of research on reading comprehension instruction and the challenge was to determine how educational research can be transformed into educational practice. Gersten et al. (1997) affirmed that there was a plethora of research entailing how instructional practices impacted student achievement. However, instruction will only improve if teachers are willing to change the manner in which they instruct students by imparting their new knowledge to better address students' needs. One method of reaching this goal is by the use of professional literacy texts with elementary preservice teachers. Through university teacher-education programs, a combination of texts and methods can help disseminate this critical information to students.

Methods and Procedures

This study employed content analysis (Berg, 2007) to examine professional literacy texts used to teach preservice teachers. State reports were evaluated to determine the five universities that had the largest number of graduates receiving initial EC-4 teacher certification. Furthermore, this study only included those teachers who graduated from traditional teacher-education programs.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted and reflected the following limitations:

1. The content analysis of professional texts did not include the table of contents, appendixes, and other supplemental material.
2. The study was limited to the required texts for both the introductory Reading and ESL methods courses. No supplemental materials were examined.
3. The study was limited to the researcher's ability to recognize reading instructional incidents, reading comprehension instructional incidents, and definitions for reading comprehension.
4. In looking for the presence of reading comprehension instructional incidents, comprehension was not implied. The

word(s) “comprehension,” “understanding,” and/or “meaning” had to be found within the text surrounding the RCII.

Textbooks used in this *content analysis* were the required texts for Reading courses at each of the universities. This course was a required introductory Reading course which explored the theoretical foundations of reading and literacy along with strategies for effective reading instruction. The required texts for each course were chosen based upon information from each university’s online bookstore. A total of 11 texts were identified for analysis.

Berg (2007) suggested that a content analysis can help identify the relationship or patterns between topics, concepts, themes, or any ideas that are consequently found in a particular body of material. For the purpose of this research study, these concepts focused on the definitions of reading comprehension and the identification of RIIs and RCIIIs in the professional Reading texts.

This practice is referred to as conceptual analysis because specific ideas are established, in this case, reading comprehension, RIIs, and RCIIIs. A relational analysis was completed to verify if and how any link between the various concepts that emerge existed. Moreover, a content analysis is basically viewed as a coding operation and a data interpreting process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Morse & Richards, 2002). Therefore, a mixed-design content analysis using both conceptual and relational content analysis was appropriate for this study.

Textbooks

After the courses were determined, online bookstore listings of each university were examined to verify the required texts for each of the selected courses. Some courses had one required text while others had two or more. All texts listed as “required” were included as part of this content analysis including texts from all sections of each course, regardless of the number of texts. However, it was not possible to know what, if any supplemental reading material was used for individual courses. Therefore, only books listed as required for each course were examined and analyzed.

Data Collection

This study was conducted through the four phases as outlined below:

Phase One: The selected texts were examined at the onset for the definition or definitions of *reading comprehension*. This was done by first consulting the index and looking under reading comprehension and/or comprehension. If a definition was not listed, the researcher continued to look for phrases such as

“comprehension is,” “reading comprehension is,” or “comprehension occurs when” throughout the text examination process. Information was recorded in a data analysis instrument designed by the researcher and included the definition of reading comprehension, book title, and page number.

Phase Two: Every page of each textbook was first scanned for the presence of RIIs. These were defined as *directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions of reading instruction* that are found within a professional literacy text. Once the RIIs were established, the researcher reviewed the list of RIIs for each text. Within the larger group of RIIs, the possibility of RCII existed because an RCII was an RII that specifically addressed comprehension and, therefore, was a subset of an RII. Therefore, all RCII were also RIIs, but not all RIIs were RCII.

For this study, all incidents that were recorded and identified as RIIs could also be considered an RCII if and only if, comprehension was acknowledged. The definition of an RCII was *directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions of reading comprehension* that were found within a professional literacy text. They offer teachers a method to aid students in developing, enhancing, improving, increasing, and/or supporting reading comprehension.

The researcher then conducted a methodical examination of the RIIs for each text. By reviewing each set of RIIs, any time an RII specifically addressed comprehension using the words “comprehension,” “meaning,” or “understanding,” it was also coded as an RCII. The same information was recorded as with the RII including the text, page number, and label given by the author(s). Next, the researcher performed a recursive examination of the labels that emerged during the data collection process. Each different label (given by the author) was written on note cards. This was done only for the labels that emerged from the RCII. From these labels, categories were merged. Using the note cards, those with similar wording and/or characteristics were placed together. This process continued until categorizing of the labels was complete.

Phase Three: A frequency count was conducted of the incidents in which reading comprehension was defined and also for frequency of the RCII.

Results

Definitions of Reading Comprehension

During data collection, the researcher examined the 11 textbooks for definitions of reading comprehension. These definitions were found by looking in the index for “comprehension” or “reading comprehension.” The words, “. . .

definition of” or “comprehension is. . .” helped to identify definitions of reading comprehension.

Of the 11 texts examined, only 6 addressed reading comprehension by giving a specific definition. A content analysis was also conducted on the reading comprehension definitions. The definitions for the reading group contained 10 different categories: (a) Understanding/Meaning, (b) Goals, (c) Reading Instruction, (d) Process, (e) Reader, (f) Text Factors, (g) Thinking, (h) Multifaceted, (i) New Information, and (j) Existing Knowledge. These, in turn, were collapsed into five categories: (a) Understanding/Meaning, (b) Process, (c) Text Factors, (d) New Information, and (e) Existing Knowledge. Figure 1 displays the frequency counts of each of the five merged categories for the Reading texts.

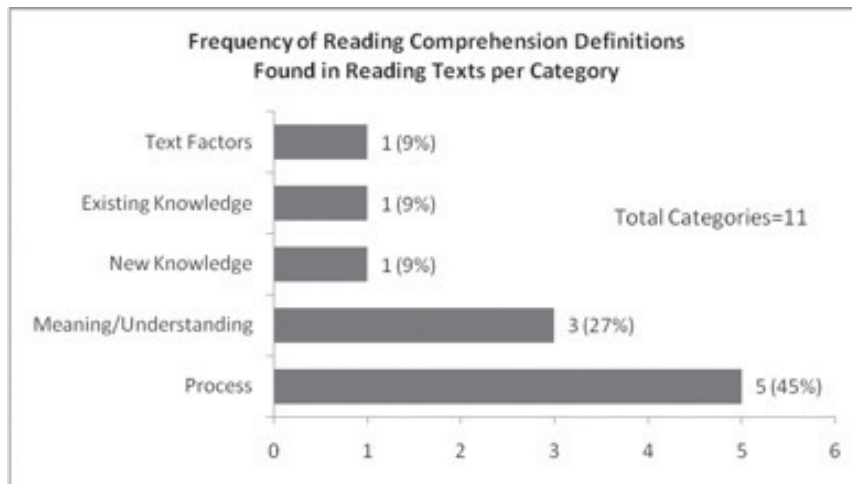


Figure 1. Frequency of Reading Comprehension Definitions Found in Reading Texts per Category

Total Reading Instructional Incidents per Data Source

Of the 11 Reading texts, the RIIs totaled 7,422. In the group of Reading texts, the lowest percentage was 1% which was the same for three different texts, 50 Content Area Strategies for Adolescent Literacy (Fisher, Brozo, Frey, & Ivey, 2006), Self-Paced Phonics: A Text for Educators (Dow & Baer, 2006), and Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing (Cunningham, 2008). The total RIIs and percentages for these three texts was 50 (1%), 82 (1%), and 95 (1%) respectively. Literacy for The 21st Century: Teaching Reading and Writing in

Prekindergarten through Grade 4 (Tompkins, 2007) had the highest percentage at 25% with 1,828 RIIs when compared to the total of RIIs (7,422) in the reading group. Figure 2 portrays the number of RIIs for each Reading text and the percentage when compared to the total number of RIIs for the group of texts.

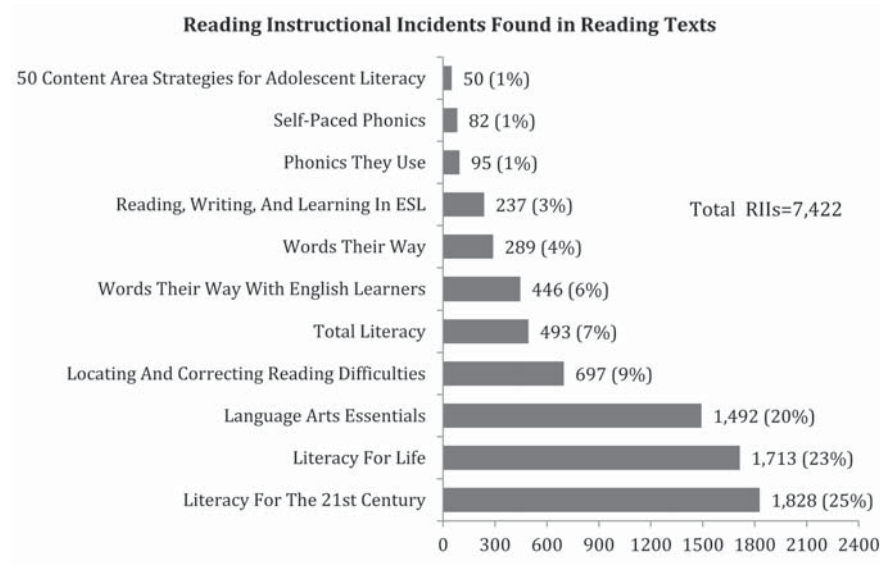


Figure 2. Reading Instructional Incidents (RIIs) Found in Reading Texts.

Total Reading Comprehension Instructional Incidents by Data Source

RCIIs were found within the larger category of RIIs. The total number of RCIIs in the reading texts was 988, which came from 7 of the 11 texts. The four remaining texts contained no RCIIs. Literacy for Life (Norton, 2006) had the highest number of RCIIs with 274, which is 28% of the total number of RCIIs. This is depicted in Figure 3.

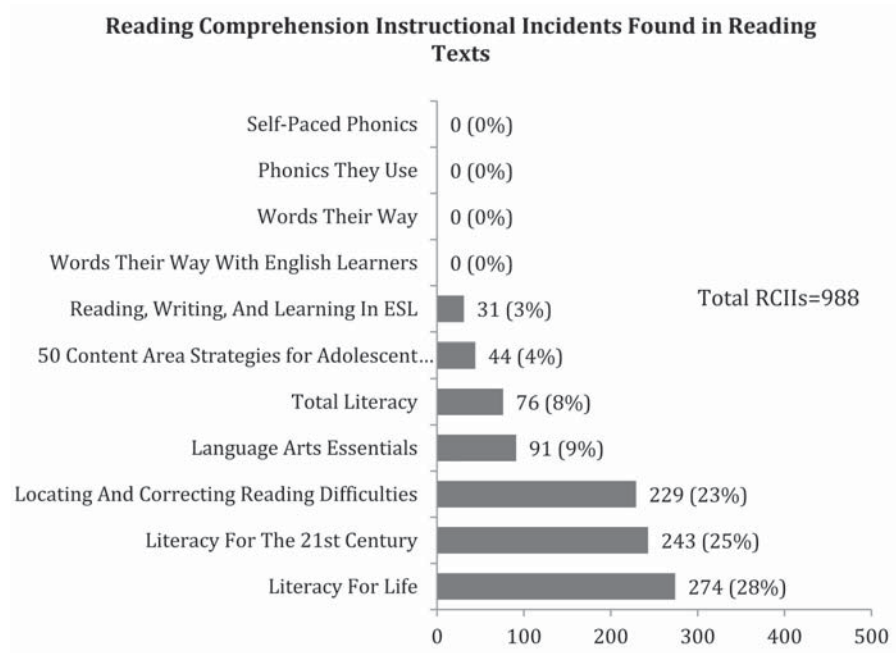


Figure 3. Reading Comprehension Instructional Incidents (RCIIs) Found in Reading Texts.

Total Reading Comprehension Instructional Incidents by Category

Of the 988 RCIIs found in the Reading texts, 48 different categories emerged from the content analysis. The 48 original categories were collapsed into 14 categories, grouped by similar concepts and characteristics. The category with the highest frequency count was strategy with 436 (44%), and the lowest was vocabulary with 17 (2%). The 14 categories for the Reading texts are shown in Figure 4 along with the frequency counts for each one.

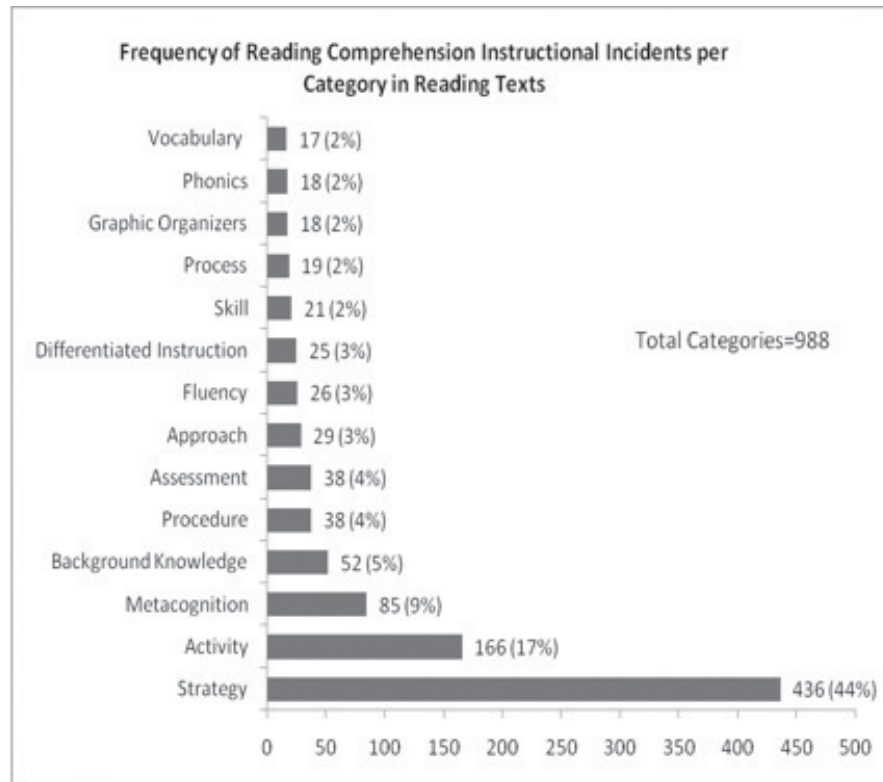


Figure 4. Frequency of Reading Comprehension Instructional Incidents (RCIIs) per Category and Text.

Discussion

Throughout the years, research has proven that comprehension instruction should be a fundamental component of reading instruction (Durkin, 1979; NICHD, 2000; Pressley, 1998). However, in order for comprehension to be implemented, it is critical that teachers be knowledgeable about how to effectively meet the needs of their students (RAND, 2004; Pressley, 2000; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2004). One way of helping teachers gain information about reading comprehension is through professional literacy texts that are used in university teacher-education programs.

Definitions of Reading Comprehension

This study examined 11 texts used in Reading courses at five universities. Surprisingly, of the 11 texts, only 7 definitions of reading comprehension were found. This finding is interesting considering that all 11 texts were used in university courses for preservice teachers regarding reading instruction and reading comprehension. Yet, fewer than 50% of the texts actually addressed what reading comprehension is. How can preservice teachers know what is expected of them when there may or not be a definition of what it is they are supposed to be doing? Based on the review of the literature, reading comprehension is an essential component of reading instruction (NICHD, 2000). It was almost as if the definition and concept of reading comprehension and reading instruction was assumed or understood, but not openly discussed just as Durkin's (1979) seminal research concluded.

RIIs and RCIIIs

The RII was the "umbrella" term and encompassed how reading instruction should be taught. They were directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions of reading instruction that are found within a professional literacy text. On the other hand, the RCIIIs were a subset of the RIIs. They were directions, explanations, ideas, and/or suggestions focusing on reading comprehension that were found within the RIIs. They offered teachers a method to aid students in developing, enhancing, improving, increasing, and/or supporting reading comprehension.

When examining the RIIs found in the Reading texts and comparing them to the RCIIIs, the researcher found there to be a vast difference. There were a total of 7,422 RIIs, yet only 988 or 7% of those were RCIIIs relating to comprehension. This is a surprisingly small percentage considering that these professional literacy texts are used in Reading courses that focus on effective reading instruction, reading strategies, and reading comprehension in the elementary classroom. In exploring the reasons behind these findings, the researcher found it necessary to examine the reasons why comprehension is central to reading and what can happen if it does not exist.

According to the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), reading is more than just decoding words. It is an interactive process that is intentional (Durkin, 1993) and through which meaning is constructed. Without comprehension, there is no understanding; therefore, no learning can take place. So, if comprehension is necessary for the reader to actively construct meaning, and the three components of the reader, text, and activity must be present in order for comprehension to be

effective (RAND, 2004), then it is natural to conclude that in order for students to learn to comprehend, they must be taught.

Therefore, the person responsible for implementing instruction is the teacher. One method that university teacher-education programs have used to prepare preservice teachers was through coursework and professional literacy texts. After successful completion of this program, a preservice teacher is fully certified to be a classroom teacher. It is through these courses and texts that a preservice teacher is first exposed to reading instructional methods and the implementation of reading comprehension strategies.

If comprehension is the ultimate goal for reading, or any lesson for that matter, one has to wonder why only 7% of RIIs in the Reading texts were directly related to comprehension. Could the impact of high-stakes testing be part of the explanation? Although teaching comprehension strategies could have a direct, positive influence on the outcome of high-stakes testing, is it possible that comprehension continues to be taught as Durkin (1979) termed by “*mentioning, practicing, and assessing?*” If so, it is highly likely that students are being assessed on what they have understood, such as the test-taking strategies they are being bombarded with, but they are not being taught to comprehend text.

Reading Texts

The lack of instructional incidents focusing on comprehension, or RCIIIs is disturbing since effective instructional practices are essential to the development of comprehension proficiency. Research has frequently substantiated that effective classroom instruction is a significant contributor to the development of comprehension skills for children (Aarnoutse et al. 2001; Conner et al., 2004).

Results from the category of graphic organizers were 18 (2%), which was another unforeseen finding since visual representation of content is advantageous for all students to aid in their comprehension of unfamiliar material. According to the NRP’s summary report, the use of graphic organizers is one of the eight recommended comprehension strategies which aid in effective reading instruction (NICHD, 2000). Therefore, this strengthens the argument that visual representation of facts is not only an effective way to aid students in comprehension of text but is substantiated by seminal national research.

That being said, it is also important to point out that it was virtually impossible to know how university professors and instructors used these textbooks. It is quite probable that supplemental material for those textbooks that were lacking in both RIIs and RCIIIs was used. These materials could be videos,

handouts, journal articles, class discussion, and the like. Furthermore, it is not known what kind of impact, if any, the instructor had or how instructional practices and reading strategies were modeled. However, research has validated the enormity the teacher's influence can have on students, regardless of the program or materials used. Indeed, it is the teacher who makes the difference (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Reutzel & Cooter, 2008; Sampson et al., 2003).

Recommendations for Further Research

One area that might be worth delving into is to examine the current EC-6 Generalist program and compare it to the EC-6 ESL program. Data for the certification information could be acquired through SBEC for a specific year in order to select the criteria for the universities.

Garcia et al. (1993) examined academic reading journals and manuals for literacy instruction related to second-language learners. Results indicated that there was little information for mainstream or general-education teachers to help ELLs develop a second language successfully. Ten years later, Eakle (2003) replicated Garcia's study by examining *The Reading Teacher* and *Language Arts*. While the study showed some progress has been made, there still is so much that is not fully known.

Even though the data collected for this study focused primarily on courses for preservice teachers, it is reasonable to suggest that more research is needed in the area of informing and educating inservice teachers who are currently working with ELLs in classrooms nationwide. Preservice teachers go through various stages during their preparation to becoming classroom teachers. This training can be done through professional development, graduate courses, and state, local, and national conferences.

Another topic worth mentioning involves the scarcity of incidents regarding metacognition within the Reading texts. Only 9% of the categories that emerged from the RCII's dealt with the metacognitive component. Barton and Sawyer (2004) conducted a study in which elementary students were exposed the comprehension process through specific vocabulary and instructional concepts. Metacognition, or "thinking about one's own mental processes," was one of the six areas that were studied (Harris & Hodges, 1995). One conclusion from the study confirmed that teachers need ample support in order to effectively teach comprehension to students, therefore, indirectly linking professional literacy texts that are used with preservice teachers while preparing them for the classroom.

Implications for University Teacher-Education Programs

At the time this study was conducted, the degree option for elementary certification was Early Childhood through 4th Grade Generalist (EC-4). At the time of this writing, the degree option had been changed to Early Childhood through 6th Grade Generalist (EC-6).

As with all sound research, while some questions are answered, many more opportunities emerge. The idea for this study presented itself through course work in a doctoral program while working concurrently with preservice teachers in undergraduate Reading courses. Through this particular university teacher-education program, students are given opportunities to learn a variety of instructional methods and strategic approaches to teaching literacy. The perspectives and opinions on the most effective instructional approach were varied and this became the catalyst to conduct research and find out more.



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