Abstract

Reading comprehension is at the center of the national reading research agenda, recently identified as the most pressing issue in literacy (Rand Reading and Study Group, 2002). Although there has been much research on how to promote reading comprehension, little implementation of recommendations in K-12 classrooms has occurred. In particular, research validates dramatic improvements in comprehension through strategies instruction. However, despite consistent and strong endorsements from the reading research community, the teaching of reading comprehension strategies remains uncommon in schools. Literacy faculty at a large western university and a large mid-western university collaborated to investigate the impact of comprehension lesson instruction on the actual teaching repertoires of both preservice (elementary and secondary) and inservice (graduate students in reading education) levels.

Overview of the 80-Minute Session

Chair will introduce session, provide overview and introduce speakers (5 minutes), Presenters briefly summarize their studies (20 minutes), Breakout sessions for in-depth discussions (participants will have opportunity to interact with two researchers) (40 minutes), Regroup for Discussant/Reactor (10 minutes), and conclude with Questions & Answers/Future Directions (5 minutes)

Presenter 1. The Impact of Clinical Experience on the Reading Comprehension Instruction of K-12 Inservice Teachers

This study explores the immediate impact of an intensive clinical experience in the teaching of reading to struggling readers on the comprehension instruction of 30 inservice teachers. Specifically, it examines the influence of this clinical experience on teachers’ views of the reading process, the nature of comprehension strategies that enter the repertoire of teachers following this clinical experience, and the effects of school site contexts on classroom teaching practices related to comprehension. Participants were enrolled in a one semester, 4-unit graduate level clinical practicum that employed an intensive microteaching component accompanied by 2.5 hours of weekly seminar in which reading strategies were introduced, modeled and discussed. Students taught a struggling K-12 reader twice a week, one hour per session, and were encouraged to incorporate strategies from seminar into this instruction. Tutoring sessions were conducted behind one-way glass and supervised by the instructor. Twenty-four, one-hour lesson logs and reflections were completed by each student. Students also maintained a tracking sheet to help monitor their use of specific strategies employed in lessons. Following completion of the course, focus group interviews with 3-4 students were conducted, taped and transcribed. Logs, tracking sheets, and interview data were analyzed to determine the frequency of use of each strategy across the sample of students. Results are reported descriptively. Responses to interview question were analyzed qualitatively for themes and categories assisted by Atlas Ti software. Strategies employed by teachers were analyzed and sorted by distinguishing characteristics using the categories in Trabasso & Bouchard (2002) as a point of departure. These categories include, comprehension monitoring, graphic organizers, listening actively, mental imagery, prior knowledge, question answering, question generating, story structure, summarization and multiple-strategy instruction. Our data enables us to describe the nature of comprehension strategies teachers tend to internalize on a continuum from most to least likely to employ, as well as pinpoint variables that seem to influence the selection or avoidance of these approaches in their teaching.

Presenter 2. Investigating the Impact of the Reading Specialist Credential on the Instructional Decisions of Veteran Teachers

How do veteran teachers select comprehension strategies to teach their K-12 students? Research has identified certain comprehension strategies that seem to work in an optimal manner to increase the reading comprehension of K-12 students (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002). However, little evidence exists about whether teachers use identified, research-based strategies when teaching (Rand Research and Study Group, 2002). Graduates of University A’s reading program (Master of Arts and Reading/Language Arts Credential program) are taught reading comprehension strategies in the intensive program where they are observed and evaluated at this teaching task. What long-term impact does instruction and experience in the graduate reading program have on the pedagogical practices of program graduates? Via teacher
surveys, the researcher inquired into how teachers who are graduates of the reading program make their instructional decisions regarding reading comprehension instruction. Over a hundred surveys were sent to program graduates with space for volunteers to be interviewed further. Selected voluntary respondents were interviewed and a further sample of volunteers observed in classrooms. Survey data was tabulated and qualitative data (open-ended responses, interview transcriptions) were analyzed and coded. Observations of selected classroom teachers and reading specialists were done to validate self-report data. Reading comprehension strategies that teachers regularly use have been categorized by type.

**Presenter 3. Teachers’ Use of Literacy Strategies to Enhance Students’ Comprehension in Content Areas**

This research examined the effect of teacher professional development on teachers' use of literacy instruction in content areas, and, ultimately, on student learning. At High School A, 46% of teachers are in graduate programs or have been within past five years. Seven literacy strategies have been adopted by school-site faculty across content areas. The research involved interviewing three randomly selected teachers from each of six content areas: the arts, physical education, science, math, English, and social studies. Staff development has been research-based and sophisticated, involving awareness and information sessions, classroom demonstrations, peer coaching, and peer presentations by those who have developed a particular expertise with one or more literacy instructional strategies. Teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. In addition to interviewing teachers, classroom observations in teachers' classrooms provided data regarding the intersection between their self-reported insights and perceptions and the actual instruction in their classrooms. Using qualitative methodology, all data from the interviews were coded for themes and trends regarding teachers' perspectives and practices relative to teaching reading comprehension across the curriculum. Classroom practices, based on observations, were examined to identify the relationship between classroom instruction and teachers' reported knowledge.

**Presenter 4. Shifting Educational Communities: The Challenges of Literacy Instruction for Novice Teachers**

Limited research exists documenting the work of secondary teachers and reading instruction. Given what we know of the need to improve content area reading instruction, greater attention should be paid to the way new teachers conceptualize their work as teachers of reading (O’Brien, Stewart, Moje 1995). Little is known of the transition that secondary pre-service teachers make as they shift from educational communities (Clift, 1994), from the academic classrooms of their pre-service programs to the realities of daily high school classrooms. As novice teachers move beyond their pre-service education into the formal classroom, how do they process the knowledge acquired from their Methods courses (Roskos, Vukelich, & Risko, 2001)? In this presentation, we provide the results of the first two years of a 3-year study that is guided by the following research questions: How do values and beliefs regarding literacy instruction shift from pre-service to in-service teaching experiences? What institutional and cultural forces are at play to influence novice teachers? What visions act to sustain new teachers? We followed two pre-service English teachers as they moved from their coursework at University B to teaching positions as high school English teachers. Over the course of two years, we have gathered data that includes focus group and individual interviews, classroom observations, and journals/course assignments. Results indicate that while novice teachers may enter their first year of teaching professing strong positive beliefs regarding literacy instruction, these beliefs are not always reaffirmed by their colleagues. New teachers’ desire to acculturate into their new educational community overrides the literacy beliefs they brought to their first job. Finally, the educational institution exerts such a strong influence to conform that new teachers are often feel powerless to resist. The researchers also document the values and beliefs related to the teaching of reading strategies and comprehension.

**Presenter 5. An Exploration of Exemplary Secondary Preservice Teachers’ Uses of Content Literacy Strategies**

A substantial body of research documents that 1) secondary students have significant difficulties comprehending expository text and 2) teachers fail to use research-based strategies designed to improve student ability to comprehend this text type. Recently, the Rand Reading Study Group
called for a national research emphasis focused on secondary students’ comprehension skills, especially in terms of teacher preparation (RAND, 2002). This, plus the need to explore “exemplars” of content literacy practice (Bean, 2000), led to the proposed study. The qualitative case study examines in depth the ways in which the participants, 4 exemplary secondary student teachers, use content literacy strategies in their assigned classrooms during student teaching and answers the question: How do exemplary secondary student teachers use content literacy strategies to develop students’ reading and writing abilities? Preliminary results of the study suggest that these student teachers find that strategy use effectively supports instruction in their content area and facilitates student learning of text content. Their decisions about which strategies to use are based upon the applicability of the strategy to their discipline, their level of comfort in terms of implementation of the strategy, and the extent to which their master teachers model particular strategies. Strategies that involve less preparation are generally favored by these student teachers, while more complex and difficult strategies are used less often. The master teachers’ uses of strategies were important factors in support of their strategy use; time constraints often undermined their efforts to use new strategies.

**Presenter 6. The Impact of Preservice Instruction on Student Teachers Decisions about Content Area Comprehension Strategies in Elementary Schools**

Unfamiliar text structures with organizational features, abstract vocabulary and high readability levels make expository text reading difficult for secondary students. Still, educators’ expectations for comprehension remain consistent; comprehension of information text means more than “just finding, answering or recognizing” (Walpole, 1998, p.358). Participants in this study are a cohort of second semester student teachers who have been taught a wide range of comprehension strategies designed to enhance and extend content area reading. These student teachers shared in discussions and demonstrations with strategies making use of textbook materials as well as information trade books. The student teachers were encouraged to use the strategies in their teaching assignments as ways to help all children negotiate complex content area texts. After 12 weeks of student teaching experiences, focus groups were conducted to reflect on content area teaching practice. Transcriptions and notes were coded for common categories. This study investigates how effective strategy instruction is for preservice teachers in content area comprehension strategies and how these student teachers make decisions about using those strategies in their instructional practice.

**Selected References**


