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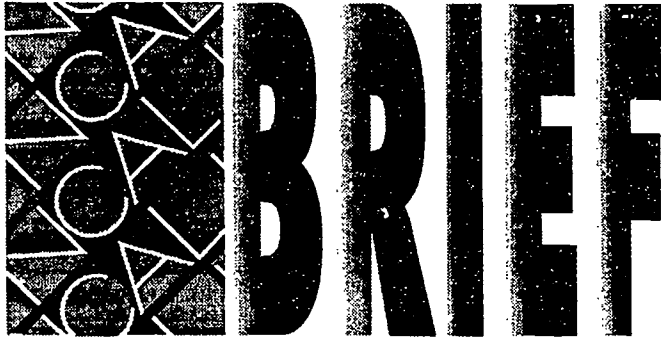
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ABSTRACT
        Research on metacognition and literacy development in
children and adults that was conducted during the past 15 years was
reviewed to determine how metacognition can be applied to
instructional approaches for adult literacy and how assessment
methods may need to be modified if metacognition is to be applied
successfully. Among the key findings of the review were the
following: metacognitive approaches to literacy training use the
prior beliefs that learners bring to the study of a given
text/situation and encourage self-appraisal and self-management;
literacy definitions and instruction have been moving away from
narrow skills-based models and toward the more comprehensive kinds of
thinking and motivational beliefs that adult learners bring to
literacy activities; and instructional approaches for adult literacy,
such as whole language and family literacy, can easily incorporate
metacognitive concepts. Interviews, surveys, portfolios, and
think-aloud techniques were recommended as possible ways of providing
more information about how adult learners use metacognition than is
provided by conventional assessment methods. The following strategies
were suggested to promote metacognition in literacy instruction: make
individuals' needs and abilities the first priority, give individuals
opportunities to take control of their own reading and writing, and
continually challenge individuals. (MN)

Metacognitive Aspects of Adult Literacy

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KEY FINDINGS:

❑ Metacognitive approaches to literacy training utilize the prior beliefs that learners bring to the study of a given text or situation and encourage self-appraisal and self-management. These approaches have been found to benefit children and seem well suited to adults as well.

❑ Literacy definitions and instruction have been moving away from narrow skills-based models and toward the more comprehensive kinds of thinking and motivational beliefs that adult learners bring to literacy activities.

❑ Instructional approaches for adult literacy, such as whole language and family literacy, can easily incorporate metacognitive concepts and, in the process, promote self-regulated, functional, and collaborative learning.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

❑ Interviews, surveys, portfolios, and think-aloud techniques may provide more information than conventional assessment methods on how adult learners employ metacognition.

❑ To promote metacognition, literacy instruction should (a) make individuals' needs and abilities the first priority, (b) include sufficient opportunities for individuals to take control of their own reading and writing, and (c) continually challenge individuals.

❑ Data are needed on how the following variables interact with adults' metacognition: (a) age, gender, and abilities; (b) cultural background; (c) dialects and multilingualism; and (d) motivation and self-perception.

INTRODUCTION

Metacognition refers to the reflective knowledge that people bring to various literacy activities. It entails two processes: *cognitive self-appraisal* (evaluating literacy tasks at hand and one's abilities) and *cognitive self-management* (planning, monitoring, and regulating one's behavior and thinking). Most previous research on metacognition and literacy development has focused on children, but this report shows that these research findings can also be applied to adult literacy training. This report reviews research on metacognition and literacy in both children and adults in order to highlight the similarities and differences.

METHODOLOGY

The first section of the report discusses definitions of literacy and points out that many factors operate to affect individuals' literacy. The second section reviews the past 15 years' research on metacognition and literacy in children. A consistent finding of these studies is that good reading skills are associated with increasing ability to appraise one's thinking and to regulate one's reading, which are the two hallmarks of metacognition. Furthermore, intervention or instructional studies have shown that children can be taught better metacognition. The third section discusses the implications of the research on children for adult literacy. The fourth and fifth sections

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discuss, respectively, how metacognition can be applied to instructional approaches for adult literacy and how assessment methods may have to be modified if metacognition is to be successfully applied.

IMPLICATIONS

Adults come to the task of learning literacy with much greater knowledge and more diverse experiences than children. Consequently, metacognition can be expected to matter at least as much for adults as it does for children. However, one should note that although metacognition may play a significant role, it may not be the sole or the most significant problem of all adults with low literacy.

FURTHER READING

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