DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 558 CS 012 746

AUTHOR Pressley, Michael; And Others
TITLE A Survey of the Instructional Practices of Grade-5 Teachers Nominated as Effective in Promoting Literacy. Reading Research Report No. 85.
INSTITUTION National Reading Research Center, Athens, GA.; National Reading Research Center, College Park, MD.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 97
CONTRACT 117A20007
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Grade 5; Integrated Activities; Intermediate Grades; Prior Learning; Questionnaires; Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Reading Skills; *Student Motivation; *Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Methods; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

Grade-5 teachers, who were nominated by their supervisors as effective in educating their students to be readers and writers, responded to questionnaires about their practice. The 33 teachers claimed commitments to: (1) extensive reading at the heart of their reading instruction; (2) diverse instructional activities (e.g., whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, cooperative grouping, individual reading); (3) teaching of both word-level and higher-order (e.g., comprehension, critical thinking) skills and processes; (4) development of students' background knowledge; (5) student writing, including teaching of mechanics and higher-order composition skills (e.g., planning, drafting, revising as a process); (6) extensive evaluation of literacy competencies using diverse assessments; (7) integration of literacy and content-area instruction; and (8) effects to promote student motivation for reading and writing. Excellent literacy instruction is a balanced articulation of many components, including whole language experiences and skills instruction. (Contains 39 references. An appendix presents a table of data listing elements of instruction reported by teachers.) (Author/RS)

A Survey of the Instructional Practices of Grade-5 Teachers Nominated as Effective in Promoting Literacy

Michael Pressley
Linda Yokoi
University of Albany, State University of New York

Joan Rankin
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Ruth Wharton-McDonald
Jennifer Mistretta-Hampston
University of Albany, State University of New York

NRRC
National Reading Research Center

READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 85
Winter 1997

NRRC

National Reading Research Center

A Survey of the Instructional Practices of Grade-5 Teachers Nominated as Effective in Promoting Literacy

Michael Pressley
Ruth Wharton-McDonald
Jennifer Mistretta-Hampston
Linda Yokoi
University at Albany, State University of New York

Joan Rankin
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 85
Winter 1997

The work reported herein is a National Reading Research Center Project of the University of Georgia and University of Maryland. It was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program (PR/AWARD NO. 117A20007) as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the National Reading Research Center, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education.

NRRC National Reading Research Center

NRRC - University of Georgia
318 Aderhold
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674 Fax: (706) 542-3678
INTERNET: NRRC@uga.cc.uga.edu

NRRC - University of Maryland College Park
3216 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742
(301) 405-8035 Fax: (301) 314-9625
INTERNET: NRRC@umail.umd.edu

About the National Reading Research Center

The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

The NRRC's mission is to discover and document those conditions in homes, schools, and communities that encourage children to become skilled, enthusiastic, lifelong readers. NRRC researchers are committed to advancing the development of instructional programs sensitive to the cognitive, sociocultural, and motivational factors that affect children's success in reading. NRRC researchers from a variety of disciplines conduct studies with teachers and students from widely diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 classrooms. Research projects deal with the influence of family and family-school interactions on the development of literacy; the interaction of sociocultural factors and motivation to read; the impact of literature-based reading programs on reading achievement; the effects of reading strategies instruction on comprehension and critical thinking in literature, science, and history; the influence of innovative group participation structures on motivation and learning; the potential of computer technology to enhance literacy; and the development of methods and standards for alternative literacy assessments.

The NRRC is further committed to the participation of teachers as full partners in its research. A better understanding of how teachers view the development of literacy, how they use knowledge from research, and how they approach change in the classroom is crucial to improving instruction. To further this understanding, the NRRC conducts school-based research in which teachers explore their own philosophical and pedagogical orientations and trace their professional growth.

Dissemination is an important feature of NRRC activities. Information on NRRC research appears in several formats. *Research Reports* communicate the results of original research or synthesize the findings of several lines of inquiry. They are written primarily for researchers studying various areas of reading and reading instruction. The *Perspective Series* presents a wide range of publications, from calls for research and commentary on research and practice to first-person accounts of experiences in schools. *Instructional Resources* include curriculum materials, instructional guides, and materials for professional growth, designed primarily for teachers.

For more information about the NRRC's research projects and other activities, or to have your name added to the mailing list, please contact:

Donna E. Alvermann, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
318 Aderhold Hall
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30602-7125
(706) 542-3674

John T. Guthrie, Co-Director
National Reading Research Center
3216 J. M. Patterson Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742
(301) 405-8035

NRRC Editorial Review Board

Susan Lytle
University of Pennsylvania

Bert Mangino
Las Vegas, Nevada

Susan Mazzoni
Baltimore, Maryland

Ann Dacey McCann
University of Maryland College Park

Sarah McCarthey
University of Texas at Austin

Veda McClain
University of Georgia

Lisa McFalls
University of Georgia

Randy McGinnis
University of Maryland

Mike McKenna
Georgia Southern University

Barbara Michalove
Fourth Street Elementary School
Athens, Georgia

Elizabeth B. Moje
University of Utah

Lesley Morrow
Rutgers University

Bruce Murray
Auburn University

Susan Neuman
Temple University

John O'Flahavan
University of Maryland College Park

Marilyn Ohlhausen-McKinney
University of Nevada

Penny Oldfather
University of Georgia

Barbara M. Palmer
Mount Saint Mary's College

Stephen Phelps
Buffalo State College

Mike Pickle
Georgia Southern University

Amber T. Prince
Berry College

Gaoyin Qian
Lehman College-CUNY

Tom Reeves
University of Georgia

Lenore Ringler
New York University

Mary Roe
University of Delaware

Nadeen T. Ruiz
California State University-
Sacramento

Olivia Saracho
University of Maryland College Park

Paula Schwanenflugel
University of Georgia

Robert Serpell
University of Maryland Baltimore
County

Betty Shockley-Bisplinghoff
Barnett Shoals Elementary School
Athens, Georgia

Wayne H. Slater
University of Maryland College Park

Margaret Smith
Las Vegas, Nevada

Susan Sonnenschein
University of Maryland Baltimore
County

Bernard Spodek
University of Illinois

Bettie St. Pierre
University of Georgia

Steve Stahl
University of Georgia

Roger Stewart
Boise State University

Anne P. Sweet
Office of Educational Research
and Improvement

Louise Tomlinson
University of Georgia

Bruce VanSledright
University of Maryland College Park

Barbara Walker
Eastern Montana University-Billings

Louise Waynant
Prince George's County Schools
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

Dera Weaver
Athens Academy
Athens, Georgia

Jane West
Agnes Scott College

Renee Weisburg
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Allan Wigfield
University of Maryland College Park

Shelley Wong
University of Maryland College Park

Josephine Peyton Young
University of Georgia

Hallie Yopp
California State University

About the Authors

Michael Pressley is a Professor of Educational Psychology and Statistics, State University of New York at Albany, and a principal investigator with the National Reading Research Center. He has published extensively in the areas of reading, memory, and cognition and instruction. His current work is diverse, including studies of exemplary primary-level reading instruction, comprehension strategies instruction, and student use of graphing calculators in postsecondary mathematics.

Ruth Wharton-McDonald is a Visiting Scientist and Lecturer at State University of New York at the Center for Student Achievement in English Language Arts. She is particularly interested in primary reading education.

Jennifer Mistretta-Hampston is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Youngstown State University. She continues there her work on parental support of children's literacy development.

Linda Yokoi is a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology and Statistics, the State University of New York at Albany, where she is continuing her work on studies skills and cognitive development.

Joan Rankin is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She conducts research on literacy instruction for children with disabilities.

National Reading Research Center
Universities of Georgia and Maryland
Reading Research Report No. 85
Winter 1997

A Survey of the Instructional Practices of Grade-5 Teachers Nominated as Effective in Promoting Literacy

Michael Pressley
Ruth Wharton-McDonald
Jennifer Mistretta-Hampson
Linda Yokoi
University at Albany, State University of New York

Joan Rankin
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Abstract. *Grade-5 teachers, who were nominated by their supervisors as effective in educating their students to be readers and writers, responded to questionnaires about their practice. The teachers claimed commitments to (a) extensive reading at the heart of their reading instruction; (b) diverse instructional activities (e.g., whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, cooperative grouping, individual reading); (c) teaching of both word-level and higher-order (e.g., comprehension, critical thinking) skills and processes; (d) development of student background knowledge; (e) student writing, including teaching of mechanics and higher-order composition skills (e.g., planning, drafting, revising as a process); (f) extensive evaluation of literacy competencies using diverse assessments; (g) integration of literacy and content-area instruction; and (h) effects to promote student motivation for reading and writing. Excellent literacy instruction is a balanced articulation of many components, including whole language experiences and skills instruction.*

What elementary-school literacy instruction should be is being intensely debated among scholars, for example, between those favoring whole language philosophy (e.g., Weaver, 1994) versus those favoring more traditional and systematic instruction and assessment (e.g., Harris & Sipay, 1990). Participants offer analyses and data that they believe support their positions. Thus, Weaver (1994, Chapter 7) reviewed controlled studies that provided data supporting positive whole language effects, both on skills (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation) and competence conceived more holistically (e.g., facility in writing). Graves

(1983) and Atwell (1989) summarized many aspects of writing that they believed were affected positively in elementary school writing communities that are consistent with whole language philosophy. In contrast, reviewers such as Stahl and Miller (1989) and Stahl, McKenna, and Pagnucco (1994) emphasized that basal-driven approaches that include explicit skills instruction produce more certain improvements on standardized measures of reading and that whole language approaches have failed to produce gains on such measures. Increasingly, there are a variety of mid-range positions in which whole language and explicit instruction are balanced, with those favoring balance claiming that the advantages of whole language and explicit instruction are complementary (Cazden, 1988; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996; Pressley & Rankin, 1994).

Despite strong claims about excellent elementary school literacy instruction and many evaluations of its effectiveness from a variety of perspectives using a range of methods, several years ago we noted a peculiar oversight in this literature. There was no information from teachers known to be effective in teaching students to read and write. This is a disturbing oversight, given that analyses of professional experts in various fields have proven to be reliable sources of information about how difficult professional-level tasks can be done well (see Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Hoffman, 1992). Moreover, various analyses of effective teaching have had substantial impact on education (General Accounting Office, 1989), such as analyses of schools that are very effective despite serving populations at great risk for educational failure (see Firestone, 1991, for a review). Thus, it made sense to us that if we wanted to learn about expert literacy teaching, study expert literacy teachers.

To date, we have completed a survey of primary-level teachers nominated by their supervisors as outstanding in promoting the literacy achievements of their students (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, and Mistretta (1996) have collected the data in an ethnographic study of outstanding and more typical grade-1 teachers. The work reported in this article is the first effort at the middle grades level, a survey of supervisor-nominated outstanding grade-5 literacy teachers from across the United States. Grade 5 was selected because it was a midpoint in the middle grades.

As we began the grade-5 survey reported here, we were aware of the results of the primary-level survey and the outcomes as they were emerging from the ethnographic grade-1 investigation. In general, that work supported the conclusion that outstanding primary-level literacy teachers do not adhere to a single model of instruction but, rather, balance whole language philosophy and explicit instruction (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Rankin, Mistretta, & Ettenberger, 1996), consistent with a number of proponents of balanced beginning literacy instruction (e.g., Adams, 1990; Duffy, 1991; Stahl & Miller, 1989). That is, outstanding primary-level teachers do much to create a generally literate environment in their classrooms (e.g., libraries, centers), with a clear literature emphasis and frequent writing related to literature. Explicit decoding and related instruction occurs. Outstanding primary-level

teachers do much to increase their students' motivations to do things academic.

As we began the study reported here, we were also aware of a great deal of research establishing various competencies and skills that need to be developed and can be developed during the later elementary years. For example, students in the later elementary grades benefit from instruction in comprehension strategies (Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989). They also benefit from learning how to plan, draft, and revise during writing (Harris & Graham, 1992). Thus, our expectation was that expert teachers might report that there is much for them to balance in delivering a grade-5 literacy instructional program.

Methods

A sample of excellent grade-5 teachers were surveyed in this study. They first completed an initial questionnaire, with the responses to the initial questionnaire used to develop questions for a final questionnaire.

Participants

Initial questionnaire. One hundred reading supervisors from the International Reading Association's list of elementary-level language arts supervisors were contacted by letter and asked to nominate outstanding grade-5 literacy teachers to participate in the study. (IRA selected the supervisors at random from their list.) In making their nominations, supervisors were to use criteria such as standardized test scores; achievement records other than standardized test scores; conversations with the teacher about his or her educational philosophy; direct observation of teaching; interaction with teacher during in-services; and/or positive comments from other teachers, administrators, or parents concerning teaching skill. We also asked the supervisors to nominate a new grade-5 teacher in their district, one in her or his first three years of teaching. The supervisor was instructed to provide a copy of a brief questionnaire (described later in this methods section) to the two nominated teachers, who were to return the completed questionnaire directly to us in a stamped, addressed envelope. Not all supervisors responded; not all responding could nominate a teacher; not all nominated teachers responded to the initial survey. In the end, 33 outstanding teachers responded to the initial survey. All of the major regions of the United States were represented in this sample. Sixteen of the teachers had completed only a bachelor's degree and 16 a master's degree, with one teacher not reporting her educational level. Experience ranged from 1 to 32 years, mean = 14.2 yrs (SD = 8.3); the teachers had between 1 and 26 years experience at the grade 5 level, mean = 8.5 yrs (SD = 7.1).

Final questionnaire. The final questionnaire (described later in this methods section) was sent to the 33 outstanding teachers who replied in the initial round. Twenty-eight of these original respondents completed and returned it.

In order to expand the sample size of respondents and, thus, increase the reliability of the mean estimates for each item, an additional 80 supervisors from the International Reading

Association list were contacted and asked to nominate an outstanding grade-5 teacher from their district using the same criteria applied in the first round. This resulted in 34 newly nominated teachers completing the final survey, so that a total of 62 nominated-outstanding teachers responded to the final questionnaire.

The supervisors of 53 of the 62 teachers responding to the final questionnaire provided information about the basis for their nomination. Based on n = 53, 25% of the teachers were nominated, in part, because of test data other than standardized test outcomes; 42% on the basis of high standardized test scores of their students; 79% on the basis of direct observation of teaching; 87% because of in-service interactions between the supervisor and the teacher; 94% based on conversations between the supervisor and the teacher about educational philosophy; and 98% based on positive comments from other teachers, administrators, and parents. On average, a supervisor cited 4.25 (SD = 1.18) reasons (out of 6) for their nomination, with three or more reasons cited by 49 of the 53 supervisors. In 98% of the cases, the supervisors indicated at least "very high" confidence in their nominee as an outstanding teacher. In the one case with a lower confidence rating, the supervisor expressed "high" confidence.

Initial Questionnaire

The main goal of the initial questionnaire phase was to assemble a list of practices that outstanding grade-5 teachers consider to be part of their literacy teaching. The questionnaire given to the nominated teachers by their supervisors indicated to them that they were selected by their supervisors as a teacher who is outstanding in promoting the literacy of her/his grade-5 students. They were informed that the goal of the study was to acquire information about how excellent grade-5 literacy teachers teach reading and writing. The cover information pointed out that excellent teachers' voices about literacy instruction typically had been ignored in the past, with one purpose of this research to correct that omission.

The teachers then were asked: "What are the 10 most important elements in your literacy (reading/writing) instruction? That is, describe your reading/writing instruction as 10 particular practices." They were also asked, "Are there some unique elements of instruction for weaker students?" We reasoned (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that when we reached a point when new respondents were offering no practices not offered by previous respondents, this phase of the study would be completed—that is, we would have identified all of the teaching practices outstanding grade-5 teachers are likely to self-report as integral to their teaching.

Two researchers coded the open-ended responses. Although there was little disagreement in their initial lists, they negotiated to eliminate redundancies, resulting in a final list of 150 elements of instruction. There were very few new responses entering the pool of responses after 20 questionnaires were examined; by the thirtieth questionnaire, no new elements of instruction were being identified. Thus, we concluded that the 33 questionnaires on hand probably came close to exhausting the possible responses to the questions that could

be provided by nominated-outstanding teachers.

Why rely on the teachers' responses to the open-ended questions? Our assumption, based on expert theory and data (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Diaper, 1989; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Hoffmann, 1992; Meyer & Booker, 1991; Scott, Clayton, & Gibson, 1991), was that outstanding literacy teachers should have a privileged understanding of the nature of excellent literacy instruction, especially of the conscious decisions they make in planning and carrying out their teaching. Thus, we felt that the teachers would be able to tell us much about the teaching in their classrooms in reaction to the open-ended questions.

Final Questionnaire

We used the 150 practices cited in response to the initial questionnaire to develop a final questionnaire assessing reading and writing instruction, items that teachers could respond to objectively (e.g., measuring the frequency of the teacher's use of an instructional practice on a seven-point Likert scale from "never" to "several times a day"). Every practice cited in response to the original questionnaire was represented on the final questionnaire, as much as possible, in the terms used by teachers in their first-round responses. A draft of the complete questionnaire was read by three researchers to spot ambiguities, which were corrected.

The final questionnaire requested 298 responses of various kinds. It was 33 pages long. Participating teachers read the following direction, which was printed on the front cover:

> You were nominated by your supervisor as a grade-5 teacher who is outstanding in promoting the literacy of her/his students. The overarching goal of this study is to generate orderly conclusions about what teachers know about reading instruction and how they carry it out. In the past, the expertise of teachers has often not been tapped in coming to conclusions about how instruction could and should be carried out. This is an important opportunity to have your voice heard.

There were 83 questions that required the teachers to respond on an 8-point scale: 0 = never, 1 = once or twice a year, 2 = once or twice a semester, 3 = once a month, 4 = several times a month, 5 = once a week, 6 = several times a week, and 7 = daily. For each of these 83 questions, participants provided a rating for instruction of "normally-achieving readers" and for "weaker readers." Examples of questions in this format are the following:

> How often do you use basal readers in your instruction?
>
> How often do you students write single paragraphs?
>
> How often do your students have revision conferences with a classmate or classmates?
>
> How often do your students do book reports?
>
> How often do you overtly model for your students how you respond to literature?
>
> How often do you explicitly teach vocabulary?

Eighteen questions required responding on the same 8-point scale, but only one time (i.e., in general rather than responding separately for normally-achieving and weaker students). These questions included the following:

If yes [you teach grammar], how often do you give grammar tests?

If yes [you teach spelling], how often do you give spelling tests?

Do you attempt to stimulate pride in persistence and trying hard in your students?

Eleven questions required responding on a 0% to 100% scale, including the following:

Estimate roughly the percentage of the total reading in your literacy program that is ... novels? ... short stories? ... plays?

Seventeen questions required responding on a 6-point scale: not at all, very little, some, quite a bit, a lot, and completely. These questions included the following:

How much of your instruction is "literature-based"?... with normally-achieving readers?... with weaker readers?

Sixty-two items simply required participants to indicate whether they used an element of teaching at all. These included items tapping curriculum materials (e.g., class library, songs, and music) and comprehension strategies (e.g., imagery, summarization).

There were ten short-answer questions, such as the following:

When you use whole group instruction, how many minutes a day do you use it?

How many minutes of uninterrupted silent reading do your students do a day?... normally-achieving readers?...weaker readers?

Five questions required teachers to indicate whether particular literature-response methods were used more with normally-achieving or more with weaker readers, including story maps, drama and role playing, letters to the author, journal responding, and generating illustrations.

Three questions, each of which were answered with respect to both normally-achieving and weaker readers, were answered on a 0 to 7 scale, with three reference points: 0 = none, 3.5 = half, and 7 = all. These three questions were:

How much of skills review is driven by demonstrated student need—rather than prespecified curriculum?

How much of your literacy instruction is well enough matched to students' level of achievement/ability that it is assured students will be successful?

What proportion of the material read by your students as part of literacy instruction is well enough matched to their reading level so that they are assured of success in reading it?

Another question requiring a response on a 0 to 7 scale was, "How much of your small group instruction is mixed ability and how much involves homogenous (i.e., same-ability) grouping?" The following reference points were provided: 0 = all small grouping is same-ability, 1.5 = more same ability than mixed ability, 3.5 = half of small grouping is same ability and half is mixed ability, 5.5 = more mixed ability than same ability, and 7 = all small grouping is same-ability.

Four different orderings of the questionnaire were developed so that each question appeared one-fourth of the time in each quartile of the questionnaire. Approximately one-fourth of the participants received each of the four orderings, so as to distribute potential order effects (i.e., fatigue, practice effects) approximately equally over questionnaire items.

Results and Discussion

All of the outcomes reported here are based on 62 responses or very close to 62 responses

(i.e., some items were not answered by all 62 teachers). One reason for confidence in the responses reported here is that there was evidence of high reliability of outcomes in these data. Recall that 28 of the final questionnaire respondents had completed the initial questionnaire and 34 had not. When the data were analyzed separately for these two groups and their performances compared statistically, there was not a single instance of difference that was significant at the $p < .01$ level. With $p < .05$, only 13 significant differences were obtained, which is less than the 15 that was expected by chance. One way of thinking about this is that the outcomes on the final questionnaire obtained with participants who had completed the initial questionnaire were replicated with another sample, the participants who only completed the final questionnaire.

We have statistically analyzed each questionnaire item, but believe that the results can best be presented in one summary table.[1] The goal in asking the teachers to make quantitative ratings was to identify instructional practices that are relatively common, for example, occurring at least weekly, in contrast to practices that occur but are less common. Thus, Table 1 presents information about instructional practices that occur at least weekly and those that are less frequent.

How was Table 1 constructed? For each type of question on the questionnaire that was revealing about frequency of occurrence of instruction, break points for more frequent and less frequent occurrence were established. For example, for the questions answered on the 0 = never to 7 = daily scale, an average rating of 4.50 or greater translated into placement in the left (occurs frequently) column; a value less than 4.50 resulted in placement in the right column (occurs less frequently). For the questions rated on the 0 = not at all to 6 = completely, the break point was 3.5. Questions requiring estimations of percentage of instruction were designated at left-column responses for values of 25% or greater and right-column responses for values less than 25%. Information not reported by teachers with respect to frequency of occurrence typically followed up the frequency-of-occurrence questions or was related to frequency-of-occurrence responses, with this information integrated into Table 1 as complementary to the frequency information.

We emphasize that Table 1 includes only information about practices that teachers nominated in the initial questionaire and that were supported by responses in the final questionnaire. Thus, in general, practices not mentioned in Table 1 were not mentioned by the teachers. What the teachers reported in this study were materials they use, instructional groupings and arrangements, word-level instruction, comprehension and thinking skills taught, how background knowledge is developed, writing instruction, indicators of literacy achievement, whether integration of literacy and other content-area instruction occurs, and motivational practices. Table 1 is organized with respect to these categories.

As summarized in Table 1, the teaching reported by this sample of teachers represents more of a blending of a variety of important

[1]Detailed statistical analyses of individual items are available from the first author on request.

language arts and instructional perspectives than of adherence to any one approach. For example, they reported that their students learn by doing things literate (consistent with holistic approaches, such as whole language) and also through explicit teaching of the components of literacy (consistent more with skills-oriented approaches).

Consistent with the whole language orientation to elementary language arts, as well as other positions such as Chall's (1983) characterization of the late elementary years as a period of transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," the grade-5 teachers in this survey portrayed their instruction as based largely on actual reading. The students in these classrooms read children's classics, other literature trade books, and expository books.

Consistent with whole language, the teachers also reported extensive writing, especially in response to literature read in school. The teachers also claimed explicit instruction in all aspects of the writing process, from planning (e.g., instruction to think about the purpose of the composition and vary writing accordingly, doing library research in anticipation of writing) to writing mechanics (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, and grammar) to revision (e.g., checking their own writing for characteristics of a complete text, conferring with teachers and peers). Other aspects of the instruction reported by this sample of teachers also are less consistent with positions embraced by whole language theorists: The teachers reported considerable explicit teaching of word-level skills (decoding, vocabulary, spelling) including preparation for decontextualized testing of these skills. Moreover, there were reports of tests provided by commercial materials producers and standardized tests, again assessments not particularly consistent with the authentic biases favored by whole language. More positively, from the whole language perspective, writing portfolios were claimed as used by most teachers in this sample. Many also reported reading portfolios. In general, the teachers in this study contended they use many sources of information about their students' literacy achievements, from responses to daily readings (e.g., comprehension questions, written responses to literature, oral sharing of reading) to frequent curriculum-driven tests to less frequent, more standardized assessments.

The teachers claimed to instruct a long list of comprehension and critical-thinking strategies. Most of these strategies derive from and were validated in studies conducted from information processing and cognitive psychological perspectives (e.g., Collins, 1991; Pearson & Fielding, 1991; Pressley et al., 1989), although many of them can also be construed (see Pressley et al., 1992) as broadly consistent with the reader response approaches favored by whole language (Beach & Hynds, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1978). The teachers in this sample reported extensive direct teaching of comprehension and critical thinking processes through modeling of such strategies, consistent with direct explanation models of strategies instruction (e.g., Duffy, Roehler, & Herrmann, 1988; Pearson & Dole, 1987).

One possible negative of a literature emphasis in reading and writing instruction is that it could occur at the expense of content-area reading. Contrary to that conclusion, however, there was some reporting of nonfiction and

expository reading, and half the teachers reported use of resources like *Scholastic News*. Also, the teachers claimed integration of language arts and content-area instruction, to some extent, with the thematic unit being an important mechanism in making language arts-content area connections.

Connectedness of instruction came through in other ways in the survey responses. We were impressed with the rich set of social connections reported as supporting literacy acquisition. Students in these classrooms were portrayed as frequently reading with their teachers, peers, younger children, and parents. The teachers claimed many small-group meetings, with the memberships in these groups fluid, and thus students regularly reading and interacting with others who vary in ability. According to the teachers, readers in these classrooms often are not reading alone, but rather going solo in the context of cooperative, supportive relations that can provide help as needed. In making that point, however, we also note that the students in these teachers' classrooms were credited with doing a good deal of independent reading—during free reading, as part of reading assigned texts, and at home.

An important concern in any classroom is with students experiencing difficulties. The nominated-outstanding teachers reported that classroom life was not much different for weaker readers compared to normally achieving readers. The differences that were reported were generally in the direction of providing more intensive and individualized instruction, particularly with respect to lower-order skills, such as decoding. That is, the watered-down, slow-it-down approach often taken with students experiencing academic difficulties (e.g., Allington, 1991), is not what the teachers in this sample claimed to do. This is critical, for the evidence is quite strong that watering down and slowing down does little good and that it does much to undermine motivation to do things literate.

These nominated-excellent teachers viewed motivation to be critical and complicated. They reported balancing complementary approaches rather than subscribing only to one approach. In alignment with attribution theory (e.g., Weiner, 1979), these teachers reported sending the message to their students that achievement in literacy is possible by exerting effort. These teachers claimed to support reasonable risk-taking and curiosity, especially consistent with whole language approaches to literacy development. Teachers reported going to considerable lengths to make certain that the literacy tasks given to students are not frustrating, with participants portraying their classrooms as filled with praise for student reading and writing achievements, consistent with learning theory (Bandura, 1986). Moreover, since Dewey (1913), it has been known that student interest goes far in motivating academic engagement. Consistent with that motivational principle, the teachers reported giving students frequent choices in deciding what they read and what they write about.

This survey is only part of our efforts to understand middle-grades literacy instruction. Studying only excellent teachers does not permit the identification of practices that are unique to excellent teachers. Moreover, self-reports and actual behaviors do not always correspond. Thus, as the writing of this article is

finalized, we are observing and interviewing intensely a sample of grades 4 and 5 literacy teachers. We are also planning explicit contrasts of excellent and more typical literacy teachers in the later elementary grades. Of course, the subsequent work is informed by the outcomes summarized in this article. For example, in planning the ongoing observation and interview study, we were sensitized to the possibility from the data reported here that there may be little reading of expository materials and less connection with content-area instruction than might be desirable. Thus, we are making certain that the ongoing study is informative with respect to these issues.

We emphasize our recognition that every methodology and method of sampling has shortcomings. That is why we use multiple methods in this program of research—surveys and observational studies, study of both large groups of teachers across the nation and more intensive analysis of the teaching of a few local teachers. We believe that this is the most certain route to reliable conclusions about elementary school literacy instruction as it is occurring in the 1990s.

Why do we need such information? There are many different and strong opinions now being offered—from teacher educators to parent groups to politicians—about what literacy instruction should be like. As we pointed out in the introduction, the well-qualified voices of expert teachers are missing from these debates. At a minimum, these data should be used to inform the ongoing debates, for these teachers offer reports of instruction that is much less extreme than many of the suggestions now in the marketplace of ideas concerning elementary education.

These data should also be used to inform teacher education. Based on all of the data about effective teaching that we have collected, including the results reported in this article, we find ourselves increasingly convinced that those who argue for eclectic teacher education are right. We reflect again (see Pressley et al., 1996) on Duffy's (1991) advisement:

> I think we do better by teaching teachers multiple alternatives ... I want [teachers] ... to select among theories and procedures according to their judgement about what the situation calls for (pp. 13–14).

If the data summarized here are correct, that is certainly closer to the truth than conceptions of excellent teaching in which teachers are faithful to particular philsophies and the practices strictly consistent with those philosophies. We think that teachers-to-be should learn that excellent literacy instruction is a balance of diverse instructional philsophies and practices (see McIntyre & Pressley, 1996) ... that, at a minimum, many excellent literacy teachers are teachers who balance perspectives rather than embrace a single philsophy.

References

Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Allington, R. L. (1983). The reading instruction provided readers of differing reading abilities. *Elementary School Journal, 83*, 548–559.

Allington, R. L. (1991). The legacy of "Slow it down and make it more concrete." In J. Zutell & S. McCormick (Eds.), *Learner factors/teacher factors: Issues in literacy research and instruction: Fortieth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 19–29). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Atwell, N. (1989). *In the middle: Reading, writing, and learning from adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Beach, R., & Hynds, S. (1991). Research on response to literature. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research: Vol. II* (pp. 453–489). New York: Longman.

Cazden, C. B. (1988). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH.

Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Chi, M. T. H., Glaser, R., & Farr, M. J. (Eds.). (1988). *The nature of expertise*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Collins, C. (1991). Reading instruction that increases thinking abilities. *Journal of Reading, 34*, 510–516.

Dewey, J. (1913). *Interest and effort in education*. Boston: Riverside.

Diaper, D. (Ed.). (1989). *Knowledge elicitation: Principles, techniques, and applications*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Duffy, G. G. (1991). What counts in teacher education? Dilemmas in educating empowered teachers. In J. Zutell & S. McCormick (Eds.), *Learner factors/teacher factors: Issues in literacy research and instruction: Fortieth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 1–18). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Duffy, G., Roehler, L., & Herrmann, G. (1988). Modeling mental processes helps poor readers become strategic readers. *Reading Teacher, 41*, 762–767.

Ericsson, K. A., & Smith, J. (Eds.). (1991). *Toward a general theory of expertise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Firestone, W. A. (1991). Educators, researchers, and the effective schools movement. In J. R. Bliss, W. A. Firestone, & C. E. Richards (Eds.), *Rethinking effective schools research and practice* (pp. 12–27). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Flower, L., & Hayes, J. (1980). The dynamics of composing: Making plans and juggling constraints. In L. Gregg & E. Steinberg (Eds.), *Cognitive processes in writing* (pp. 31–50). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum & Associates.

General Accounting Office (1989). *Effective schools programs: Their extent and characteristics*. Washington, DC: Author.

Graves, D. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Harris, A. J., & Sipay, E. R. (1990). *How to increase reading ability: A guide to developmental and remedial methods*. New York: Longman.

Harris, K. R., & Graham, S. (1992). Self-regulated strategy development: A part of the writing process. In M. Pressley, K. R. Harris, & J. T. Guthrie (Eds.), *Promoting academic competence and literacy in school* (pp. 277–309). San Diego CA: Academic Press.

Hoffmann, R. R. (1992). *The psychology of expertise: Cognitive research and empirical AI*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

McIntyre, E., & Pressley, M. (Eds.). (1996). *Balanced instruction: Strategies and skills in whole language*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Meyer, M., & Booker, J. (1991). *Eliciting and analyzing expert judgement: A practical tour*. London: Academic Press.

Pearson, P. D., & Dole, J. A. (1987). Explicit comprehension instruction: A review of research and a new conceptualization of instruction. *Elementary School Journal, 88*, 151–165.

Pearson, P. D., & Fielding, L. (1991). Comprehension instruction. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research*: Vol. II (pp. 815–860). New York: Longman.

Pressley, M., El-Dinary, P. B., Gaskins, I., Schuder, T., Bergman, J., Almasi, J., & Brown, R. (1992). Beyond direct explanation: Transactional instruction of reading comprehension strategies. *Elementary School Journal, 92*, 511–554.

Pressley, M., Johnson, C. J., Symons, S., McGoldrick, J. A., & Kurita, J. A. (1989). Strategies that improve memory and comprehension of what is read. *Elementary School Journal, 90*, 3–32.

Pressley, M., & Rankin, J. (1994). More about whole language methods of reading instruction for students at risk for early reading failure. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 9*, 156–167.

Pressley, M., Rankin, J., & Yokoi, L. (1996). A survey of instructional practices of primary teachers nominated as effective in promoting literacy. *Elementary School Journal, 96*, 363–384.

Pressley, M., Wharton-McDonald, R., Rankin, J., Mistretta, J., Yokoi, L., & Ettenberger, S. (1996). The nature of outstanding primary-grades literacy instruction. In E. McIntyre & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Balanced Instruction: Strategies and skills in whole language* (pp. 251–277). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Scott, A. C., Clayton, J. E., & Gibson, E. L. (1991). *A practical guide to knowledge acquisition*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Stahl, S. A., McKenna, M. C., & Pagnucco, J. R. (1994). The effects of whole language instruction: An update and reappraisal. *Educational Psychologist, 29*, 175–186.

Stahl, S. A., & Miller, P. D. (1989). Whole language and language experience approaches for beginning reading: A quantitative research synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 59*, 87–116.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Weaver, C. (1994). *Understanding whole language: From principles to practice*, 2nd edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*, 3–25.

Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Mistretta, J. (1997). *An ethnographic study of outstanding and typical grade-1 literacy instruction*. Albany, NY: University at Albany, SUNY, Department of Educational Psychology and Statistics.

Appendix

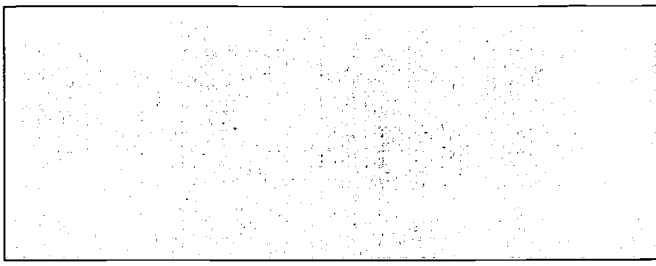
Table 1
Elements of Instruction Reported by Teachers

	Occur Frequently (At least weekly)	Occur Less Frequently
Materials	Literature-based instruction	
	Reading of children's classics (on average, about 45% of reading is reading of classics)	Basal readers (but 33% of participants reported that they never use basals)
	Trade books (38% of teachers reported their use for all reading instruction)	Computers
	Novels reported as most frequent (43% of all reading), followed by short stories (25%)	Reading of essays, plays, and poems written by students themselves; poetry; expository essays; and plays
	Student-selected reading (on average, about 45% of reading)	
	Student-paced reading	
	Use of libraries, learning centers	
	Newspapers (e.g., *Scholastic News*), radio, and TV news	
	Audiotapes (23% of teachers reported greater use with weaker readers)	
Instructional Grouping and Activities	Whole-class instruction	A student tutoring younger/weaker students
	Cooperative grouping	A student receiving tutoring from older/stronger readers (more frequent for weaker than normally-achieving readers)
	Teacher- and student-led small groups (small group membership fluid, not determined by ability)	A student analyzing reading errors with an adult
	Teacher reading of literature of various sorts	Student in one-to-one teacher conference
	Daily silent reading (23 minutes on average)	Choral reading
	Reading for pleasure at home (more frequent for normally-achieving readers than weaker readers)	
	Oral reading	
	One-to-one instruction (more frequent for weaker than normally-achieving students)	
	Guided practice (more frequent for weaker than normally-achieving students)	
Word Level	Decoding instruction	Decoding instruction
	Encourage students to sound out words (more frequent with weaker students)	Explicitly teach phonics, word attack, and/or decoding (more frequent with weaker students)
		Practice reading words out of context, for example, with flashcards (only a minority of teachers used this approach at all)

	Vocabulary	Vocabulary
	Explicitly teach vocabulary (All teachers teach vocabulary encountered in readings; about one-third of teachers use other sources, including basal and published vocabulary lists)	Explicitly teach root words
	Go over vocabulary that will appear in upcoming reading	
	Explicitly encourage students to infer meanings from context clues	
	Spelling Instruction (Variety of sources for words, depending on teacher: spelling text, basal lists, words encountered in reading)	
Comprehension and Thinking Skills and Processes	Teacher modeling of response to literature	Teach SQ3R approach, with only 69% reporting ever teaching this approach during course of the school year
	Teaching and teacher modeling of comprehension strategies (e.g., strategies of predicting upcoming content, thinking about what is known about a topic before a reading, thinking about purpose for reading, thinking about purpose for reading, asking questions about text, summarizing, consciously monitoring when text does not make sense, seeking clarification when part of a text does not make sense, analyzing stories for story grammar elements, finding main idea and related details, relating text content to prior knowledge, attempting to infer details not in text, mental imagery, looking for and making use of similes and metaphors and analyogies, critically evaluating text content, and/or rereading)	Self-assessing progress in reading, with only 80% reporting ever doing this during the course of the school year Teaching students to read quickly, with only 18% reporting any such teaching during the course of the school year
	Teaching and modeling critical thinking skills	Teaching and modeling critical thinking skills
	Possibility of multiple answers	Identifying propaganda
	Brainstorming	
	Deciding between options	
	Separating facts from opinions	
	Review of comprehension strategies and thinking skills on as-needed basis	
Development of Background Knowledge	Using word webs, story maps, pictures, video tapes, etc.	
	In-class enrichment activities	
Writing	Writing related to material read during reading instruction	Writing projects involving library or other research
	Writing single paragraphs	Writing projects involving library or other research
	Writing longer than one paragraph	

	Creative writing	
	Expository writing	
	Writing on topic of own choice	
	Teaching writing processes	Teaching writing processes
	Have students plan, draft, revise as part of writing	Teach students to vary writing as a function of purpose for writing
	Teach writing mechanics, such as punctuation and capitalization (57% reported selecting mechanics only on basis of student needs; 25% of teachers reported using student needs and set surriculum; and 19% reported following set curriculum only)	Revision conference with teacher or other adult
		Revision conference with classmates
	Teach grammar	Have students check writing for characteristics of completeness, such as idea and content, organization, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and use of conventions
	Encourage to spell words needed in writing by sounding them out (more frequent with weaker students)	
	Sharing through reading aloud of own writing	Sharing of writing by publishing
Indicators of Reading Achievement	Comprehension questions	Comprehension questions
	Oral questions following a reading	Written questions following a reading
		Cloze-type items following a reading
	Response journals, essays, illustrations, or story maps	Responding to text by writing the author a letter
		Formal sharing of stories or books by students
		Book reports
	Tests	Tests
	Spelling	Curriculum-based (i.e., tests over content covered in class)
		Vocabulary
		Writing Mechanics
		Grammar tests, accompanying commercially-produced materials
		Standardized tests
		District-produced tests
		Portfolios
		Writing
		Reading

Integration of Literacy and Content-Area Instruction	Quite a bit of instruction integrated, reported by 89% of teachers, although only 15% reported complete integration of literacy and content-area instruction	
Motivation	Stimulate curiosity	Using games involving reading skills
	Encourage taking of reasonable risks	
	Encourage pride in persistence and trying hard	
	Encourage belief that some texts require hard work to understand them	
	Encourage belief that good writing requires substantial effort	
	Praise reading and writing successes (e.g., read student writing to the class)	
	Instruction matched to students' level of achievement/ability (more frequent for normally-achieving than weaker students)	
	Match texts to students' level of achievement/ability (more frequent for normally-achieving than weaker students)	



NRRC National Reading Research Center

318 Aderhold, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602-7125
3216 J. M. Patterson Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☐ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☑ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").