DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 160   CS 511 988

AUTHOR   Brushaber, Teri
TITLE   Teaching Comprehension through a Comprehension Strategy
                 Framework.
PUB DATE   2003-04-28
NOTE   18p.
PUB TYPE   Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE   EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Action Research; Classroom Research; Data Collection; Grade
                 4; Intermediate Grades; *Reading Comprehension; Reading
                 Improvement; *Reading Processes; Reading Research; *Reading
                 Strategies; Standardized Tests
IDENTIFIERS   Direct Instruction; *Strategic Reading; Strategy Training

ABSTRACT
            Competent readers use strategies automatically; moreover, the
use of strategies is a natural part of their reading process. Interested in
the effects of the direct teaching of strategies to poor readers, a
researcher decided to use a classroom action research approach. She studied
reading strategies used by competent readers before, during, and after
reading. Of particular interest was the comprehension strategy framework
approach as described by Dowhower (1999). The research question was: Will
teaching comprehension through a comprehension strategy framework improve
poor readers' comprehension? To further explore the general question and
determine the effectiveness of direct strategy instruction, three questions
were focused on: Will group discussion comments of poor readers include more
high-level comments as classified by Bloom, Englehart, et. al. (1956)?; Will
journal responses of poor readers increase in length and include more high-
level responses as classified by Bloom (1956)?; and Will performance of poor
readers on standardized assessments of comprehension improve? Subjects were
12 students from the fourth grade at an elementary school in a rural town
near Austin, Texas. Data collection included: teacher observation during
group discussions; reader response journals; and multiple-choice assessments
written in a format similar to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
(TAKS) test scores. At the project's conclusion the researcher administered
the released version of the Reading TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic
Skills) test students had taken the previous year. The four reading
strategies used by competent readers were taught directly. Results were
slightly positive, possibly because of the limited time the researcher was
allowed with the participants. Includes a figure. Contains 11 references and
data forms. (NKA)

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Teaching Comprehension through a Comprehension Strategy Framework

Teri Brushaber

Southwest Texas State University

1

1988

Teaching Comprehension through a Comprehension Strategy Framework

Empowered readers are successful readers. For students to feel empowered to read for the real world, they need the necessary tools. However, in many elementary classrooms, reading for class is much different than reading for the real world. Classroom teachers have been found to lack the knowledge of how to teach comprehension, to misunderstand the difference between strategy teaching and instructional techniques, and confuse assessment and direct teaching of comprehension (Dowhower, 1999).

Reading strategies are a main component of a competent reader's engagement in text and his or her subsequent success with that text. Strategic reading is an automatic process for the competent reader before, during, and after reading. Poor readers lack these seemingly natural and necessary reading strategies; therefore, they continue to struggle. Reading strategies can be taught to poor readers through direct instruction. As a result, poor readers can become strategic and competent readers.

Literature Review

Competent readers are motivated (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) and strategic readers (Dowhower, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Koskinen, 1995). Competent readers use strategies automatically; moreover, the use of strategies is a natural part of their reading process. Poor readers lack motivation because they lack the strategies necessary for success. Strategies are not a natural part of poor readers' reading process, yet all students need strategies they can use every day (Fielding & Pearson, 1994).

Reading is an interactive process. It involves an interaction of the text and what the reader brings to the text (Lipson & Wixson, 1991; Rumelhart, 1985). Therefore, a strategic reader is a competent reader because he or she brings much to the text strategically. Reading is also an active process involving the transaction, or change, occurring in the reader due to what is read. Each reader takes from the text something different than the next reader depending upon the transaction that occurred (Rosenblatt, 1994). Therefore, a strategic reader is an active reader because the strategic reader is actively involved in the reading process through the use of strategies.

Purpose

Interested in the effects of the direct teaching of strategies to poor readers, I decided to use a classroom action research approach. I studied reading strategies used by competent readers before, during, and after reading. Many different ways to teach these strategies were available. I was interested in the comprehension strategy framework approach as described by Dowhower (1999). The general question I developed was: Will teaching comprehension through a comprehension strategy framework improve poor readers' comprehension?

To further explore this general question and determine the effectiveness of direct strategy instruction, I developed three questions on which to focus my attention:

a) Will group discussion comments of poor readers include more high-level comments as classified by Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956)?

b) Will journal responses of poor readers increase in length and include more high-level responses as classified by Bloom et al. (1956)?

c) Will performance of poor readers on standardized assessments of

comprehension improve?

Establishing the Starting Point

The students selected for this classroom action research were identified based on

an educational need as evidenced by criterion-referenced, standardized test scores,

authentic assessment in the classroom, and teacher recommendation.

Description of Students

I worked with 12 students from the fourth grade class at an elementary school in

a rural town near Austin. There were five nine-year olds, five 10-year olds, and two 11-

year olds. There were six girls and six boys. Six were White and six were Mexican-

American. All subjects were in good health.

Timeline, Data Collection, and Evaluation

My goal was to offer additional support outside the regular classroom in an

attempt to help these students improve their reading comprehension, in turn making

gains on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. During afternoon

tutorial sessions, I worked with the identified students within a small group setting. We

met 30 minutes a day, three to four days a week, for six weeks. Data collection included

the following: 1) teacher observation during group discussions, 2) reader response

journals, 3) multiple-choice assessments written in a format similar to the TAKS test,

and 4) Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test scores. I evaluated the

students' responses during group discussions using two tables (see Appendixes A & B),

I evaluated the students' response journals based on the evidence of growth over a

period of time (see Appendix C), and I evaluated the practice tests in the TAKS format

using an objective scoring scale from 0 to 100%. At the conclusion of the action research

project, I administered the released version of the Reading TAAS test the students had

taken the previous year.

Conducting the Study

At first, the students were hesitant to share their thoughts regarding the purpose

for reading and reluctant to write information regarding prior knowledge. These were

two prereading strategies found to be used by competent readers. Most students in the

group did enjoy making predictions. Another prereading strategy used by competent

readers. Although, they seemed to make simple guesses as opposed to insightful

predictions. I began by teaching the students prereading strategies including setting a

purpose, for gathering information or for enjoyment, (Dowhower, 1999; Fielding &

Pearson, 1994), thoughtful predicting rather than simple guessing (Dewitz & Dewitz,

2003; Dowhower, 1999; Pressley, 2000), and activating background knowledge

(Dewitz& Dewitz, 2003; Dowhower, 1999; Pressley, 2000). I explained each prereading

strategy, modeled how to use it, and engaged the students in a discussion about each

one. We discussed each strategy until the students felt comfortable with the

understanding of each one. We followed our discussion with the application of each

strategy.

Over the six weeks' period, the students and I read two expository passages, two

narrative passages, and one narrative picture book. Before each reading, we

implemented the use of all three prereading strategies. As the students practiced more

with each reading, they became more comfortable with all three strategies. Prereading strategies were naturally followed by the teaching of reading strategies.

Initially the students were unsure of how to set a purpose for each section of reading, how to monitor their own reading, how to discuss the reading, or how to visualize the author's intent. These were four reading strategies used by competent readers. I began teaching these four strategies to use during reading, including setting a purpose for each section (Dowhower, 1999), monitoring own reading (Dowhower, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Pressley, 2000), discussion of text (Dowhower, 2000), and visualization (Dowhower, 1999; Pressley, 2000).

I introduced the first three reading strategies during the first week. We discussed each strategy until the students felt comfortable with the understanding of each one. All three reading strategies were practiced with each new passage or picture book during the study. During the fourth week, I introduced the fourth reading strategy, visualization. We again discussed this strategy until the students felt comfortable with the understanding of it. During each new reading, we implemented the use of all four reading strategies. As the students practiced more with each reading, they became more comfortable with most of the strategies used during reading. The teaching of reading strategies was naturally followed by the teaching of postreading strategies.

Finally, I taught the students about postreading strategies including written response and formal assessment (Dowhower, 1999). Following the reading of the narrative picture book, the students wrote journal entries in response to the reading. They were willing to write responses to the reading, but some did not understand what

should be included in their writing. We discussed different ideas for what to include in a postreading journal, and the students felt a little more comfortable with the idea of what to write. Those students that enjoyed writing wrote lengthy journal entries, and those students who did not enjoy writing wrote a minimal amount. All students wrote about different parts of the book and related to different parts of the story.

Following the reading of the narrative and expository passages, the students completed formal assessments in a format similar to that of the TAKS test. At the conclusion of the study, I administered the released version of the Reading TAAS test the students had taken during the previous year.

Results

The students' ability to use prereading strategies improved. The students' purpose-setting ability improved as evidenced by their ability to quickly and correctly identify the proper purpose. The students' ability to activate background knowledge improved as evidenced by what they choose to write. Most students began to understand that the length of their background knowledge list was not important. They were comfortable writing as little or as much as they already knew. It was no longer important to try to fill a page with an exhaustive list of background knowledge. Most students' predictions improved with practice as well. They began making thoughtful predictions based on clues from titles, subtitles, pictures, and captions. They also used their background knowledge to make meaningful predictions.

The students' ability to use reading strategies somewhat improved. Setting a purpose for each section continued to be problematic for the students. Their responses

were more predictions than purposes. Most students were better able to monitor their own reading as evidenced by their increased ability and interest in looking back to their predictions and background knowledge while reading. Three students were still reluctant to share during the discussion of the material; however, the other nine students' participation during discussion time increased as the weeks passed. Visualization came easy to all but one student. They were able to visualize the author's intent through mental imaging. This was a strategy some students already knew, but did not realize its importance during reading.

The students' use of postreading strategies did not exhibit much improvement. Their written responses remained relatively short and lacked insight. The students' performance on formal assessments following the reading of two expository passages and one narrative passage did not improve.

My first focus question, "Will group discussion comments of poor readers include more high-level comments as classified by Bloom et al. (1956)?" was answered minimally. Most students' participation in group discussions did increase. However, their comments were only slightly higher-level than when we first began.

I was discouraged in trying to answer my second focus question, "Will journal responses of poor readers increase in length and include more high-level comments as classified by Bloom et al. (1956)?" With the limited time available, the students were only able to write two journal entries. Both entries were in regard to the narrative picture book. The length of the journal entries did increase for those students who wrote two entries. However, only one student's journaling increased in depth.

I was met with both disappointment and satisfaction when answering my third focus question, "Will performance of poor readers on standardized assessment of comprehension improve?" The students answered objective questions following the reading of both expository passages and one narrative passage. The students' scores on these formal comprehension assessments did not improve. However, the results of the released version of the Reading TAAS test were most impressive. The average score for the group increased from 63% to 79%. Nine students' scores improved, two students' scores remained the same, and one student's score dropped (see Figure 1). It is worthy to note that the student whose score dropped told me he simply marked answers on the test so he could be dismissed to physical education class.

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Conclusion and Teaching Implications

My general question, "Will teaching comprehension through a comprehension strategy framework improve poor readers' comprehension?" was only partially answered. Discussion improved slightly, journal entries increased in length but not in depth, and formal assessments following the reading of passages did not improve. The only marked improvement following the study was the improvement in the Reading TAAS scores.

I believe teaching comprehension through a comprehension strategy framework can improve poor readers' comprehension. Although, my use of the comprehension

strategy framework was not as successful as it could have been. I believe this to be a direct result of the limited time I was allowed with the students in the study. Given the slightly positive results realized in such a short amount of time, I believe much more could be accomplished over an entire school year. As a teacher of reading, I would certainly implement the use of a comprehension strategy framework in the classroom during the regular school day.

Overall, conducting a classroom action research study was a positive experience. I learned much about the importance of conducting such research to remain current on educational trends and to continue my growth as a professional educator.

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Appendix A: Group Discussion records

DISCUSSION GROUP RESPONSES: TEACHER CHART FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS			

Title of Reading Material: _____

Author or Source: _____

Type of Reading Material: Narrative   Expository   **Date:** ___ / ___ /03

Name	Responded	No. of Responses	Discussion Response Comments
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		
	No Yes		

Appendix B: Individual Records

	DISCUSSION GROUP RESPONSES: INDIVIDUAL RECORD		
Name of Student:			
Title of Reading Material:			
Author or Source:			
Type of Reading Material:	Narrative	Expository	

Date	Type(s) of Discussion Responses[1]	Level of Discussion Responses[2]	Comments
___ / ___ /03	Create, Hypothesize, Construct, Forecast, Imagine Judge, Evaluate, Give opinion, Viewpoint, Critique Classify, Categorize, Compare/Contrast, Solve Demonstrate, Build Restate, Give examples, Explain, Summarize Tell, Recite, List, Define, Locate	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___ / ___ /03	Create, Hypothesize, Construct, Forecast, Imagine Judge, Evaluate, Give opinion, Viewpoint, Critique Classify, Categorize, Compare/Contrast, Solve Demonstrate, Build Restate, Give examples, Explain, Summarize Tell, Recite, List, Define, Locate	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___ / ___ /03	Create, Hypothesize, Construct, Forecast, Imagine Judge, Evaluate, Give opinion, Viewpoint, Critique Classify, Categorize, Compare/Contrast, Solve Demonstrate, Build Restate, Give examples, Explain, Summarize Tell, Recite, List, Define, Locate	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___ / ___ /03	Create, Hypothesize, Construct, Forecast, Imagine Judge, Evaluate, Give opinion, Viewpoint, Critique Classify, Categorize, Compare/Contrast, Solve Demonstrate, Build Restate, Give examples, Explain, Summarize Tell, Recite, List, Define, Locate	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	

[1]Trigger words taken from Winebrenner (1992).
[2]Bloom's Taxonomy levels as described in Bloom et al. (1956).

Appendix C

RESPONSE JOURNAL			
Name of Student: _____			
Title of Reading Material: _____			
Author or Source: _____			
Type of Reading Material: Narrative Expository			
Date	**Response Length**	**Level of Reponse**	**Comments**
___/___/03	9 or more (___) sentences, 8 – 7, 6 – 5, 4 – 3, 2 – 1	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___/___/03	9 or more (___) sentences, 8 – 7, 6 – 5, 4 – 3, 2 – 1	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___/___/03	9 or more (___) sentences, 8 – 7, 6 – 5, 4 – 3, 2 – 1	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	
___/___/03	9 or more (___) sentences, 8 – 7, 6 – 5, 4 – 3, 2 – 1	Synthesis Evaluation Analysis Application Comprehension Knowledge	

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Reading TAAS scores of students before and after the study.
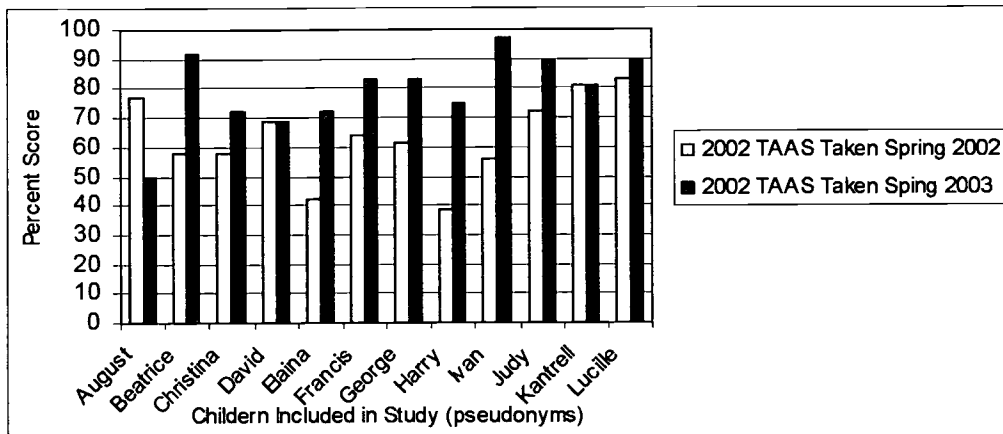
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Signature: *Teri L. Brushaber*	Printed Name/Position/Title: Teri L. Brushaber Classroom Teacher
Organization/Address: PO Box 2144, Wimberley, TX 78676	Telephone: 512-847-2862	FAX:
	E-Mail Address: tbrushaber@yahoo.com	Date: 4/28/03

tbrushaber@austin.rr.com