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The Relationship Between Comprehension
And Literature Based Reading Programs

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of
the Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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Abstract

Previous research indicates that children involved in a literature based reading program are actively involved in the task of reading. Research also indicates that children in literature based programs made significantly higher gains in reading versus their peers in a basal reading program. In the present study three classrooms of third graders, all of which were using a form of literature based reading instruction, were compared to determine the effect of the respective reading program on comprehension. Literature based reading programs used were student selected literature based reading, whole class literature based reading, and teacher pre-grouped literature based reading. The California Achievement Test was used as a measuring tool. The results were that among literature based reading groups there was no significant difference in comprehension gain. However, when comparing the student selected literature based reading program with the growth the children had made the previous year, a significant gain was noted.

Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between comprehension and types of literature based reading instruction. The literature based programs included: student selected literature based program, teacher pre-grouped literature based program, and a whole class literature based program. Comprehension was defined as gaining meaning from the literature read.

Comprehension was compared contemporarily between literature based programs and historically in respect to the student selected literature based program.

Questions

1. Will third grade students show as much or more growth as they have in previous years while receiving reading instruction, for the first time, from a student selected reading program?
2. Will third graders in a student selected reading program make significantly greater growth in reading comprehension than third graders in other

literature based reading programs?

Need for the Study

Reading is fundamental to all areas of education. It is the educator's responsibility to help a child become the best reader he or she can become. There has been much discussion as to which reading approach will benefit the student the most.

Methods of reading instruction have been researched extensively for years. Whether the instructional method is phonetic based, basal based, literature based, an individualized approach, or a whole language approach, the end goal of each is to produce a reader--a reader who wants to read and enjoys reading.

The use of literature in the classroom, whether it is used as the instructional method or as a supplement to another instructional method, has been shown to be an integral part of reading instruction. Literature provides a child with a reading selection in its entirety free from vocabulary constraints of graded readers and full of material which is likely to increase a child's desire to continue reading. This desire is essential if a child is to become a literate adult.

Literature can be used throughout the reading program in many ways. It can be the basis for reading

instruction or used during read aloud time or sustained silent reading time. A child's exposure to literature can also be used to increase vocabulary and listening skills. Literature can be used with children at all levels, each child taking from a literature selection what he or she can or needs, thereby eliminating the need for ability grouping. The use of literature in the classroom is therefore an essential element in the reading program whether used as the sole reading program or integrated into an existing program by using literature as a supplement. Kindy (1989) states that children's literature is a valuable tool which should be used for reading instruction in the elementary classroom.

Some educators feel there is a real need for students to be instructed in skills as traditionally taught in basal readers in order for them to become competent readers. Still others feel that these skills are not necessary and extensive reading will generate the greatest growth and produce fluent readers.

With literature based reading instruction becoming more prevalent, there has developed a need to study students' comprehension growth to determine if they continue to grow in comprehending written material

while involved in a literature based reading program.

A comparison of various literature based approaches to reading instruction will provide educators with more information on which to base their decision as to which form of reading instruction they feel will allow the greatest growth in comprehension of written material.

Definition of Terms

Student selected literature based reading program

a program in which students self-select their reading material, discussion groups are formed based on the selection, and follow up activities are completed. Discussion groups, facilitated by the teacher, and follow up activities are used to assess comprehension of reading material.

Teacher pre-grouped literature based reading program

a program in which the teacher groups trade books according to theme, and the students have a choice as to which pre-grouped book they will read. Literature discussions facilitated by the teacher, limited teacher prepared questions which are answered by the students in writing, and a follow up activity are used to assess comprehension.

Whole class literature based reading program

a program in which the teacher selects the trade book or selection from Impressions reading series to be read by the class together. Teacher prepared questions, prepackaged questions, and classroom discussion are used to assess comprehension.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher was limited in availability of literature based classrooms in which teaching experience was similar.

Another limitation of this study was the varying teaching styles of the teachers involved.

Summary

This study was an attempt to determine if there existed a relationship between student growth in comprehension and the type of literature based reading program in which the student is involved. It was also the intent of this study to determine if an individualized literature program enabled greater comprehension growth or at least comparable comprehension growth as had been recorded in previous years.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This review examines the research on literature based reading programs. In particular the review investigates various aspects of literature based reading instruction which affect a child's comprehension, interest in reading, motivation to read, attitude toward reading, and grouping for instruction.

Interest and Motivation

Basal instruction has been one of the most widely used methods of reading instruction. Basal readers tend to present skills in isolation and in an arbitrary sequence which results in the loss of reading enjoyment and motivation for many children (Kindy, 1989). Literature tends to provide reading material which has a greater interest level and provides more of a challenge for the more able reader. Interest is a key factor in whether a child is motivated to read. Rasinski (1988), based on observations of his own children, reported that children who are given a choice in their academic lives are motivated internally. They want to participate in activities which they select. Students in

a literature based program are involved actively in cognitively complex tasks, where students in a program which is skill oriented are involved in cognitively small tasks in which they assume a passive role (Fisher & Hiebert, 1990).

Bader, Veatch, and Eldredge (1987) reported that children in literature based programs made significantly higher gains than those using basals and that their interest in reading increased significantly.

Many educators feel children cannot read material which is in their frustrational range. Belloni and Jongasma (1978) found that students can comprehend materials which fall into their frustrational range if the students have an interest in the material being read. They also stated that difficult materials read for recreational purposes can actually be of benefit to a child's reading program. Asher, Hymel and Wigfield (1978) found a child comprehends high interest material better than low interest material.

Interest also affects a child's desire to read. A child must want to read if he is going to continue to read. Children must be involved in the reading process if they are to grow significantly (Eldredge & Butterfield, 1984). Students in a literature based approach have a role in determining tasks, share

interpretations of the material and are given an opportunity to write about and or discuss their reading with others (Fisher & Hiebert, 1990). Children who were taught reading by use of literature books instead of basal readers showed an increase in reading interest as well as higher gains in achievement (Eldredge & Butterfield, 1984). They also found that children whose reading program had a literature base also made greater gains in vocabulary development than children in a basal program.

Eldredge and Butterfield (1984) conclude that students who are involved in a literature based program will achieve better than students in a basal reading program. The students in the literature based program tend to enjoy reading more and have a greater interest in books.

Huck (1977) takes the position that reading motivation and interest in reading come from literature not from the teaching of skills. Smith and Bowers (1989) state that this happens when teaching with a whole piece of literature. The reader can understand and really fall in love with a book, whereas excerpts and ten page stories found in basals do not hold the same interest for a reader.

Grouping for Instruction

In basal reading programs, groups are typically formed based on skills tests. These groups then stay in place for the school year with little opportunity to change groups. Skills tests have long been used to determine reading placement. Grouping should be based on interest not on ability (Bader, Veatch & Eldredge, 1987). It is a child's interest, not his or her level, which will motivate him or her to continue reading. Groups which are formed based on reading level often limit a child's opportunity to grow (Bader, Veatch, & Eldredge, 1987).

Devine (1989) reported that critics of grouping allege that grouping may do more harm than good. While the students in the high ability group are reading more and receiving more praise, the students in the low ability group are asked to read material beyond their instructional level and are allowed less time for self-correction. As reported by Devine (1989) from the Commission on Reading 1985, children once assigned to a reading group tend to stay with their original group.

Fuhler (1990) feels that an added benefit of a literature based program where children choose their own materials is that grouping by ability level becomes a procedure of the past. Thus, no struggling reader has to

endure the humiliation of being a member of a low group.

Grouping for reading instruction is transcended in a literature based reading program. Second grade children who were exposed to literature read literature and understood it regardless of its readability level (Eldredge & Butterfield, 1984).

Individualized Reading

Student selected, or individualized reading instruction, takes literature based reading one step farther than a literature based basal reading program or a teacher selected literature based reading program. Children learn to read by using literature, but the piece of literature is one which the child has chosen, is interested in and will meet the needs of the child's instructional reading program. Cleary (1957) states no other single factor, save that of the teacher, influences more decisively the learning experiences provided students than do materials of instruction. Hiebert and Colt (1989) state that to prepare proficient readers, classroom reading programs must provide children with many varied opportunities to read high quality literature. Fuhler (1990) reported that by choosing their own book, students have a personal interest in their reading program.

Basal programs tend to divide reading into isolated skills through the use of workbooks. When these workbooks are completed successfully the student is considered a successful reader (Kindy, 1989). Kindy further states that reading is a process in which the reader searches for meaning. Skills are not ignored in an individualized program but instead are taught during a reading conference (Gordon & Clark, 1961). These conferences consist of a retelling of a section of the story, and questions and answers to assess comprehension and skills needed by that particular student (Gordon & Clark, 1961; Sharpe, 1958).

Since the children in an individualized reading program are partially responsible for book choice reading is viewed as an enjoyable activity (Kingsley, 1958; Sharpe, 1958). In a study performed with her own second grade class incorporating an individualized reading program into her existing basal program to increase reading achievement of each child, Sharpe (1958) found that as time progressed students read more pages than they would have in a basal program alone and increased achievement level was indicated. Children said they liked reading (Gordon & Clark, 1961) and increasingly began to show a

preference for reading at independent activity time (Sharpe, 1958).

Based on observations of his own children, Rasinski (1988) reported that his eldest child, Mikey, who was in first grade, openly stated he enjoyed kindergarten more than first grade because he had a say in his assignments. When Mikey reached first grade his reading assignments were all teacher directed. Mikey was no longer allowed to choose his own reading as he was in kindergarten. As result, Mikey viewed himself as a non-reader, who was in a lower level book than his classmates. Rasinski went on to say Mikey's reading no longer fulfilled his needs but fulfilled the needs of the curriculum.

Gordon and Clark (1961) found that in an experimental individualized reading group of two second grade classes a gain of 7.32 months was noted on the Stanford Achievement Test reading achievement score. During the same research, the control group, which was basal instructed, grew only 3.04 months in reading achievement. These gains were reflected on standardized tests and, more important, in the child's self-concept. Level of reading becomes unimportant as all children are reading and enjoying books they choose (Kingsley, 1958). The stigma of the reading group disappears.

In a research project conducted for a three year period with first grade children in public schools, Johnson (1965) found children in individualized instruction showed considerable gains in reading comprehension and reading vocabulary. Bohnhorst and Sellars (1959) reported the results of a research program conducted with primary grade children. In this research program, all classes participated in a basal reading program for one half of the school year and in an individualized reading program for one half of the school. They reported children in an individualized reading program tend to increase average levels of achievement over basal instruction and widened the range of individual achievement. When a child finds himself in a successful learning situation and can respectably compete against his peers (Jones, 1948), his individual needs are met and his self-confidence regarding reading increases along with his motivation and his desire to read.

Attitude Toward Reading

After concluding an experimental program in individualized reading, Gordon and Clay (1961) asked children about their feelings toward reading. Most of the children responded that they liked to read. The

children felt that they were good readers. In their study Gordon and Clark (1961) concluded the individualized reading program gave the children a feeling of success and created a child who read more and had greater self-confidence. The combined feelings of success and greater self-confidence helped to create a favorable attitude toward reading. Savage (1988) reported a literature based reading program has a positive effect on increasing a child's reading ability. He further states that literature in reading instruction programs provides a child with the opportunity to both learn and apply skills while enjoying the process of reading.

Hiebert and Colt (1989) also found that a literature based program gave students the opportunity to learn how to select literature. Good readers know how to choose literature relevant to their interests and reading level. Being able to decide on ones' own, what piece of literature is to be read, enables a reader to select literature suitable for the himself and fosters a positive feeling toward reading.

Kindy (1989) stated that, as desire and motivation for reading are heightened, the child will read more and more. According to Tunnel and Jawls (1989), students' attitudes showed a marked improvement when allowed to

read books which were hard for them. The students felt the effort to read was worth it because the book was one they wanted to read. Fader (1968), as reported in Bower (1988), stated that students' attitudes must be improved before one sees any lasting effects on performance.

Durkin, as reported by Devine (1989), stated that children in high ability groups feel better about themselves. They see themselves as winners while the low ability groups consider themselves losers. These latter students have a tendency to live up to the expectations of their group. These expectations can only lead to poor attitudes toward reading. However, Shumaker and Shumaker (1988) found that using books like the higher ability students use communicates higher expectations from the teacher. Shumaker and Shumaker (1988) also reported a literature based program allows the remedial or lower ability reader to use real books, the same kind they see fellow classmates and adults read.

Positive attitude toward reading seems to be affected by allowing children to select their own reading material. McKenna and Kear (1990) reported the students' attitudes towards reading are a central factor affecting reading performance. Becoming a skilled

reader requires learning that written material can be interesting. Emotional response to what is being read is the primary reason most readers read and lack of this emotional response is probably the primary reason most non-readers do not. Literature based programs allow for a more personal, emotional response to what is being read.

Summary

Interest, motivation, and attitude all play a significant role in how a child comprehends the material he reads. A child must want to read for his reading progress to continue. Literature based reading programs are one way to positively affect a student's interest, motivation, and attitude toward reading with the end result being increased comprehension.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between three literature based reading programs and comprehension. The three types of literature based reading instruction were student selected, teacher pre-grouped, and whole class literature based reading.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were investigated in this study:

Null Hypothesis I. There will be no significant difference in comprehension between a student selected literature based reading program, a teacher pre-grouped literature based reading program, and a whole class literature based reading program.

Null Hypothesis II. There will be no significant difference in comprehension gain within a student selected literature based reading program when compared with previous year's comprehension gain prior to involvement in a student selected literature based

reading program.

Methodology

Subjects

Sixty-six students from three third-grade classes from a public school in a rural area of western New York served as subjects. The classes were of mixed ability levels. All classes were in their first year of using a literature based program for reading in which trade books comprised at least fifty percent of the reading program. In the preceding years, the students were involved in a literature based basal reading program.

Instrument

The California Achievement Tests, Form E, Level 11, 12, and 13 were used to chart comprehension. These tests are administered annually district-wide in May. The raw scores of the reading comprehension section of the test were used.

Procedures

Class A was involved in a whole class literature based reading program. Within this program, the teacher choose trade books and selections to be read from the Impressions reading series. Impressions is a literature

based reading series in which selections of literature are presented without condensation. After reading the assigned selection, class discussion was held and teacher prepared questions or publisher prepared questions were answered. In addition to the literature based reading program, class A participated in DEAR time (uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading) and the teacher read from a book daily.

Class B was involved in a teacher pre-grouped literature based reading program. The teacher in class B pre-grouped trade books based on theme or concept of study. The students were then allowed to choose from the pre-grouped books. Teacher prepared questions were answered. Group discussions were held with the teacher as facilitator. A follow-up activity such as a mural, book commercial, or a poster was completed by the students. Class B participated in DEAR time and the teacher read from a book daily.

Class C was involved in a student selected literature based reading program. The students choose books on the literature groups bookshelf (see Appendix A) based on individual interest. The choice was at times guided by the teacher if a child made a selection in which he or she would encounter difficulty

reading. Based on the student selection, literature groups were formed. The students recorded journal entries in their reading journals on a daily basis. After the students in a given literature group completed their selection, the group meet to discuss the book. First journal entries were shared, then based on the information shared from these journal entries, a group discussion was held. The students then completed either a group project or an individual project of their own choice. This project was then shared with the class along with a group recommendation of the book read. Class C participated in DEAR time, and the teacher read from a book daily.

All classes were involved in their respective literature based reading program from September through mid May. In mid May the California Achievement Tests were administered district-wide. The results from the comprehension section of the California Achievement Tests were used to determine comprehension differences.

Analysis of Data

Raw scores from the comprehension portion of the California Achievement Test were used to compare comprehension growth.

Mean comprehension was determined for each

literature based classroom. These mean growth figures were then compared across classrooms in a one way analysis of variance to determine if there was any statistically significant difference in comprehension growth between literature based reading programs.

A correlated t test was used to compare the mean comprehension score of the student selected literature based reading program to the mean comprehension score from the previous year. This was done to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between gain in comprehension from the previous reading program to the student selected reading program of the current year.

Summary

This study was designed to investigate comprehension growth attained while involved in a literature based reading program. The California Achievement Test was the measurement tool used to compare growth between classrooms. The raw scores were compared contemporarily between classes and historically with the student selected literature based reading group.

Chapter IV

Findings and Interpretation of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between comprehension and three literature based reading programs. The three literature based reading programs included student selected, teacher pre-grouped, and whole class literature based reading. These literature programs were compared contemporarily. The student selected literature based reading program was also compared historically.

Analysis of Data

Null Hypothesis I

There will be no significant difference in comprehension scores among a student selected literature based reading program, a teacher pre-grouped literature based reading program, and a whole class literature based reading program.

A one way analysis of variance was run to determine if there was a significant difference between the three literature based reading programs on the California Achievement Test in comprehension. Since the computed $F(1.35)$ is smaller than the critical value of $F(3.80)$ the data fail to reject the hypothesis of no

significant difference. Table 1 summarizes these data.

Table 1

One Way Analysis of Variance

<u>Source of variation</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>sum of squares</u>	<u>mean square</u>	<u>F</u>
program(between)	2	65,08	32,54	1,34
within groups	65	1562,52	24,02	-
Total	67	1627,60	-	-

Fcrit.=3.80

Null Hypothesis II

There will be no significant difference in comprehension gain within a student selected literature based reading program when compared with the previous year's comprehension gain prior to involvement in a student selected literature based program.

A correlated t test was run to determine if there was a significant difference in comprehension gain when compared to the previous year. Since the computed t value (3.75) was greater than the critical value at 0.05 (2.086), the hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected. Table 2 summarizes these data.

Table 2

Correlated t Test

<u>Sample</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
1991	21	77.62	6.86
1992	21	88.44	4.52

t (df=20) = 3.75

Critical value at 0.05 = 2.086

Summary

Analysis of data failed to show a significant difference in comprehension gain between literature based programs. A significant difference in comprehension gain was found when the students were engaged in a student selected reading program compared to the previous years' reading program.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship among comprehension and three literature based reading programs (student selected, teacher pre-grouped and whole group). It was also the purpose of this study to determine the relationship between comprehension gain and students in a student selected literature based reading program for the first time.

Conclusions

The results of this investigation demonstrated that there was no significant difference in comprehension gain among a student selected literature based reading program, a teacher pre-grouped literature based reading program and a whole class literature based reading program. While there was a difference in the mean comprehension scores for each group, a one way analysis of variance showed the differences were less than significant.

It should be noted that the sample size investigated was limited to three classrooms. If a larger sample had been available, this may have affected the results. It is also possible that the most

important feature of a literature based reading program is the trade books and not the form of grouping or questioning.

Also important to note at this time is the testing instrument used. The California Achievement Test was the only test available for the purposes of this investigation. However, this test tool may not accurately assess the skills obtained and growth made while involved in literature based reading instruction. Portfolio assessment, running records, assessment of reading response journals, assessment of creative writing may better serve the purpose of assessing literature based reading instruction.

As for the investigation into the comprehension gain of the student selected literature based reading program when compared to the previous year, the investigation revealed a significant comprehension gain when the students entered the literature based reading program. The gain the students made while in the student selected literature based reading program were shown by the correlated t test to be of a significant difference.

Worthy of note are comments from parents and students alike concerning their new found love for reading. Many parents and students throughout the year related to the investigator how the student's love of

reading grew as well as the number of books the student read grew. More and more students began to choose reading as a freetime activity. This increased involvement with reading itself could be partially responsible for the gain in comprehension.

It is concluded from this study that students in various literature based reading approaches gained an equal amount in comprehension gain. The methods employed within the literature based reading programs appeared to equally enhance students' reading comprehension. It is also concluded that students in a student selected literature based reading program versus a whole class basal reading program (Impressions) gained a greater amount in reading comprehension.

Implications for Research

Since a year long study of comprehension gain between literature based reading produced no significant difference, it would be valuable to follow a group of students for several years to determine the long term effects of various literature based reading approaches. It would also be valuable to investigate a larger group including more than one class from each type of literature based reading program.

An investigation into the attitudes of the students

towards reading while involved in a literature based reading program would be useful. While a student's comprehension may increase, it would be helpful to determine if a student's enjoyment and willingness to read also increased.

Another suggestion for future research is to investigate the number of books a student reads. Does the number of books read vary between literature based reading approaches or between literature based reading programs and basal reading programs?

Finally, another consideration for possible investigation is the relationship between reading programs and how a child spends his or her freetime. The manner in which a child spend his or her freetime could have important educational implications for parents, teachers and students.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Based on the findings of this study, it would appear that incorporating a literature based reading program into the classroom would have a positive effect on the reading comprehension of students. Other research has shown that many other positive effects such as improved self-esteem, motivation and desire can result from involvement in a literature

based reading program.

It is important to note that of the three literature based reading programs investigated, all proved equally effective in promoting comprehension. Teachers should therefore modify literature based reading programs to better fulfill the needs present in their classes. Based on this investigation, there appears to be no one "right" way to utilize a literature based reading program in the classroom.

In reviewing the research on literature based reading programs, it should be noted that students who have a choice take more of a personal interest in their reading program. It would be advisable for the teacher to take this choice factor into consideration when developing a literature based reading program for use in their classroom.

Summary

The findings of this study revealed no significant difference between literature based reading programs. However, a significant difference was found when students were involved in a literature based reading program for the first time versus a basal reading approach (Impressions).

The implementation of a literature based reading

program can produce positive benefits in the area of comprehension but a longer investigation involving more students is necessary to more fully determine the benefits of literature based reading in the area of comprehension. Future investigations should also be conducted involving the areas of number of books read, attitude toward reading, and how students spend their freetime.

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