

The Effects of Self Questioning on Comprehension of Expository Text and Development of Content Writing with Second Grade Students

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1. Introduction

Improving reading comprehension and writing skills with second grade students, ages seven to nine, is important to the students' future success. State-wide testing at younger grades to comply with federal laws makes teaching students to comprehend more complex text, specifically expository (non-fiction), a high priority for elementary teachers. Teaching students to ask questions before, during, and after reading has been successful in previous studies to increase reading comprehension, not focusing on expository text. More studies confirm integration of reading and writing instruction as beneficial for reading and writing development. The reading program used in the school where I teach does not focus on developing writing skills in conjunction with reading skills. We teach writing separately. This project focused on answering two questions: 1) Does development of self-questioning strategies before, during and after reading significantly affect comprehension of expository text with second grade students, and 2) Will using the same questioning skills and information gained from reading significantly affect development of the traits organization and ideas and content in student expository writing?

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion and Significance

Research to this date has not sufficiently explored the relationship between high level, self-questioning, and literacy development of primary students. The present study examines the writing and comprehension skills of second grade students using a Question Answer Relationship strategy for pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading, as well as writing, and compares their progress to other second grade students not using the same strategy.

Sample

There are nineteen students varying in age from seven years to nine years of age. Eleven speak English as a second or third language. The ethnic breakdown is as follows: two Hispanic males, five Hispanic females, one Vietnamese male, one Vietnamese female, one Cambodian male, one Laotian male, one African-American male, one African-American female, one biracial male, three Caucasian males and two Caucasian females. Seventeen of the nineteen students receive free or reduced lunch. All students are in a regular second grade classroom in a Midwestern, urban elementary school of approximately 850 students. FF students receive speech services. No students currently receive special education services beyond speech.

Procedure

All students, experimental group and control sample, completed a pretest and a post-test using a topic-main idea-detail triangle and expository article scored using the rubric designed for the task. After reading, students wrote a paragraph about the article they read. Student writing was scored using the 6 Trait Writing analytical model.

The experimental instruction took place during three phases, each using a different genre of expository literature. During phase one and two students worked in cooperative groups and with partners on their research

topics. During phase three students completed work independently. Each phase of the experiment followed the same format.

The questioning stem organizer was introduced or reviewed and the development and recording of questions on the questioning graphic organizer were modeled before reading. The teacher modeled during reading strategies, including thinking aloud, marking passages that might help answer the questions, recording answers to questions, and formulating additional questions occurred during the read aloud. After reading, questions were answered from information in text and recorded on the organizer. Questions not answered were noted and additional questions recorded, noting their level. Additional sources that may help respond to unanswered questions were discussed and explored. Modeling occurred twice during the first phase and once for phases two and three before the students began the process. Each modeled lesson took approximately two, forty-minute sessions.

Students chose a topic to research, developed their questions, and recorded on the questioning graphic organizer. Student partnerships were given books about their topic on reading level. Some students chose to use internet sites in addition to the available reading material.

Each student wrote an informational report (3-5 paragraphs) about his research topic. Partners served as peer editors during the writing process. Student papers were rated using the 6 Trait Writing analytical model focusing on ideas and content and organization.

The students also worked toward developing questions orally during the writing process. During each phase of the modeled process oral questioning was recorded and scored for each student.

Results

The data were analyzed using a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) comparing the scores of students receiving instruction in questioning skills and the students in the stratified sampling group receiving regular classroom instruction. Expository reading comprehension, ideas and content in writing and organization in writing were evaluated.

The area showing the greatest significance of growth between groups of students was in the area of reading comprehension ($P=0.034$) validating the use of questioning skills as a pre-reading, during reading and post reading strategy. Significant growth was also shown in the area of ideas and content in writing ($P=0.039$) leading to the conclusion that this questioning process is an effective prewriting strategy for expository writing. Significant growth was not shown in organization in writing ($P=0.066$) indicating this strategy was no more effective developing writing organization than the strategies currently in use in other second grade classrooms.

3. Conclusions

The results indicate using questioning skills as a pre, during, and post reading strategy is effective to increase comprehension of expository text. Repeated modeling and practice with this self-questioning strategy was successful with the students, especially those who are struggling with second language acquisition. Modeling, working cooperatively to learn the strategy, and then using the strategy independently gave students a lot of confidence in their own abilities to get information from text. Students were able to express genuine interest in their topics through their writing. To improve organization while using the questioning strategy, I would suggest adding an explicitly taught organizational technique.

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