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Teachers' Instructional Time in Reading and Material Usage

Melissa Davis

Olga Flamion

Joyce C. Fine

Florida International University

Over thirty years ago, Durkin (1978-79) found that teachers in upper elementary grades spent little time on comprehension. Durkin (1978-79) also discovered that the teacher manuals that accompanied basal reading programs provided little instruction to teachers on how to teach comprehension. Beck et al. (1979) attained similar results when they concluded that basal reading programs do not support comprehension. Finally, during this same period, Durkin (1981) concluded that teachers and teacher manuals mainly assessed comprehension by asking questions and not instructing how to comprehend.

More recently, Raphael, Pardo, and Choo (1996) revealed that the push for accountability, determined by high-stakes assessments, has led to more generic reading instruction. Raphael et al. (1996) stated that many states aligned their basal reading programs with high-stakes assessments. Since this research, the student population has become more diverse, reflecting the increasing diversity of the United States of America. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2011), the 2010 census data showed that the Hispanic population accounted for 16% of the United States population, Asians for 5%, Black for 13%, and multiracial as 6%. In addition, between 2000 and 2010, both the Hispanic and Asian populations increased by 43% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

Teachers must meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out the different materials teachers use with a diverse student body. In

addition, the amount of time teaching reading, particularly comprehension, was examined to determine the mean amount of time teachers spend on instruction, apart from testing time, which includes asking students questions. This study seeks to ascertain if teachers devoted more time to comprehension instruction since the studies of Durkin (1978-79; 1981) and Beck et al. (1979) and if they are varying the materials used to teach reading.

Method

The amount of time teachers spend providing instruction in the different components of reading was determined through a self-reported survey, which asked teachers the amount of time used to teach each component and the materials used in each.

Participants

Surveys were given to all elementary reading teachers at three schools, approximately 70 teachers. The participants of the study were 24 teachers from three public schools (one elementary and two K-8 centers) in a large, diverse school district in South Florida. Therefore, only 34% of the teachers in the original sample population returned the survey. The teachers all taught at least one reading class each day to students in kindergarten through fifth grade and had been teaching for a varying number of years (anywhere between one and 20 plus years). While those teachers who participated in the survey are anonymous, the teachers employed at the schools generally reflect the diversity of the student population. The majority of the students are Hispanic, with many English Language Learners. In addition, the schools were located in different socio-economic neighborhoods. One was in a middle class neighborhood, one was in a working class neighborhood, and the third was in a poor neighborhood.

Sampling Procedures

The three schools selected to participate in the study were chosen as they were convenient for the researchers. Permission was received from the principals at the three schools. In addition, approval was received from the university and the school district in which all three schools are located.

Measure

A researcher-made survey was given to all the reading teachers at the three schools. The survey directed teachers to quantify the number of minutes they spend each week teaching the components of reading. The components of reading were listed as phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In addition, teachers were asked to list the materials they used to teach each component. Materials were divided into types, namely basal materials, basal supplements, school-bought supplements, computer supplements, teacher-bought supplements, and teacher-made supplements. Finally, teachers were asked how many minutes they spend testing students each week. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

Research Design

The surveys were distributed to the reading teachers at the three schools which were chosen for convenience. The surveys were placed in each teacher's school mailbox. The surveys had a cover page promising the teachers anonymity and explaining the purpose of the survey. The teachers were then given a deadline to submit the survey, approximately two weeks after it had been distributed. The teachers were instructed to place their completed surveys in a designated mailbox at each school site, ensuring that their anonymity would be protected.

Once the deadline to receive surveys was reached, the surveys were collected and analyzed, determining average time values regarding the amount of time spent teaching reading and the amount of time spent testing. In addition, the correlation between the amount of time spent teaching reading and the specific amount of time devoted to teaching comprehension was calculated. Finally, the material types were synthesized to provide an overview of the different materials currently being used by the teachers at the three schools.

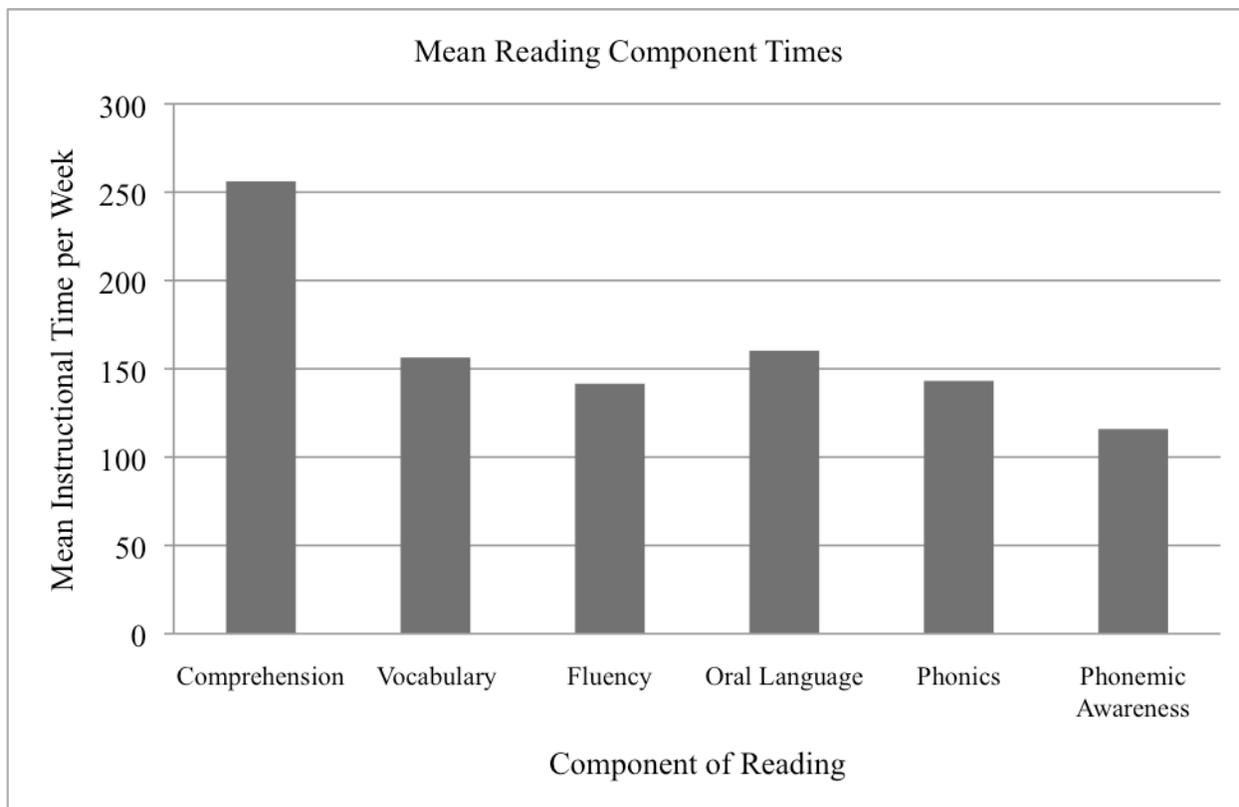
Results

The surveys were distributed at the three schools on November 7, 2011 and had to be returned by November 18, 2011 to be included in the study. Once all completed surveys were received, they were analyzed for mean instructional times. Not all teachers broke their instructional time down by the components of reading, limiting the data collection from some of the surveys. Twenty-four teachers returned the survey, but only 13 of the surveys were fully completed. The mean amount of time spent teaching reading per week was reported as 973.50 minutes per week, with a standard deviation of 612.52 minutes (N = 22). The total amount of testing time was reported as 66.92 minutes, with a standard deviation of 23.23 minutes (N = 13). The district in which the schools are located mandates that reading be taught 90 minutes a day, for a total of 450 minutes a week. Using this amount for the required reading block, teachers are using 15% of mandated reading time to test students. Table 1 shows the mean instructional time for each component of reading. Additionally, Figure 1 details the mean of the components in graph form, illustrating that comprehension is the component given the most instructional time, while phonemic awareness receives the least.

Table 1
Mean Amount of Time Spent Teaching the Components of Reading

Reading Component	Number of Respondents (N)	Mean (M) of minutes taught per week	Standard Deviation (SD)
Comprehension	22	256.18	146.36
Vocabulary	22	156.41	111.33
Fluency	22	141.59	114.95
Oral Language	22	160.23	197.76
Phonics	22	143.18	109.19
Phonemic Awareness	22	115.91	99.72

Figure 1



Correlation between total reading time and the minutes spent teaching comprehension per week was 0.62. This correlation is significant at the .01 alpha level of significance. Teachers reported using an average of 4.67 materials, with a standard deviation of 1.17 materials (N = 24). The only basal material reported was the Houghton Mifflin reading series, which is mandated by the district. The teachers reported using several of the supplements that come with the basal reading program. Those listed by the teachers were: comprehension flashcards, high frequency cards, picture cards, punctuation cards, leveled readers, vocabulary readers, novels, reader's library, phonic's readers, On My Way readers, guided reading books, big books, cassette tapes, graphic organizers, charts, The English Language Learner Handbook, and the Extra Support Handbook.

Table 2 lists the school-bought and computer supplements used by the teachers completing the survey. These materials are bought with school or district money. Teachers may be required by the school or district to use some or all of these materials.

Table 2

Reading Materials Bought with School or District Monies

School-Bought Supplements	Computer Supplements
Voyager	Reading Plus
Novels	SuccessMaker
Comprehension Centers	Ticket to Read
Phonics Books	Starfall Website
Leap Pads	Accelerated Reader
Elements of Reading – Vocabulary	STAR Reading
Extended Foreign Language Program Materials	Waterford
Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) Comprehension Binder	Imagine Learning Reading
Words Their Way	Riverdeep (QZAB)
	FCAT Explorer

In addition, teachers listed a variety of materials that they had either bought or made themselves. These materials typically require the teacher to use their own time and/or money. They reported using these materials with their students to teach one or more component of reading. Table 3 lists the materials reported by the teachers.

Table 3

Reading Materials Supplemented by the Teachers

Teacher-Bought Supplements	Teacher-Made Supplements
Response to Reading Center	Fluency Scripts
Building Thinking Skills Workbook	Vocabulary Tasks
Writing Center	Charts
Listening/Fluency Center	Vocabulary Sentence Strips
Listen & Respond Center	Segmenting Sounds Game
Grammar Bingo	Letter Flash Cards
Lakeshore Nonfiction Cards	Fry Words Flash Cards
Lakeshore Comprehension Cards	Rhyming Words Cards
Writing Activity Pockets	Bingo
Flip Charts	Language Master Cards
Ready Made Centers	Picture Word Recognition
Instant Learning Centers	Classroom Literacy Centers
Phonics Centers	Reading and Vocabulary Tests
Sight Word Cards	Florida Center for Reading Research Centers
Chunk-It Cubes	English Language Learner Strategies
Magnetic Letter Tiles	Graphic Organizers

Phonics Worksheets	FAIR Centers
Nursery Rhyme Worksheets	Online Printables
Flash Cards	Buddy Study for Spelling
Focus Series	
K-3 Student Center Activities	
National Geographic Explorer	
Ready, Set, Learn Reading Comprehension	
Take It to Your Seat Phonics and Reading Centers	
Mailbox Yearbook	

Discussion

This study found that teachers are using a variety of materials to provide reading instruction to their students, with a large amount of material coming from supplements that teachers have bought or created themselves. This may indicate that teachers do not find the basal reading series adequate for the needs of their diverse students. Unlike the findings of Durkin (1978-79), teachers appear to be spending a large amount of time on reading instruction. In addition, a significant portion of this reading instructional time is used to teach comprehension, as the survey specified that teachers approximate the amount of time teaching comprehension, apart from questioning the students.

Much variance was found in the amount of time teachers spend teaching reading in general and each of the six components of which it is composed. The teachers who responded to the survey reported varying amounts of reading instructional time; there was no one survey that could account for the variance, indicating that teachers do not strictly follow the district-mandated reading times. Some teachers who completed the survey also reported increased reading instructional times as they have incorporated reading instruction into the content areas.

There are several limitations to the current study. First, out of approximately 70 teachers who received the survey, only 24 returned it; this is a 34% completion rate. Out of these 24 surveys, 13 were fully completed. The open-ended responses required on the survey may have inhibited some of the teachers from participating. Finally, the surveys were only distributed to teachers at three schools so generalizations made from them are limited.

Overall, the results of the study are positive as it appears that teachers are spending much of their instructional time teaching reading, especially comprehension, and have incorporated reading into the content areas. In addition, teachers are using differentiated materials to meet the needs of their diverse student population. Finally, teachers were only spending 15% of the required reading time (66.92 minutes out of a weekly minimum requirement of 450) to test the students. Therefore, standardized testing aside, teachers do not appear to be over-testing students.

This study should be replicated with a larger sample size to determine if similar teacher responses are found. Also, some observations should take place to find out if the times reported by teachers are accurate, if the materials are actually being used, and if the instruction provided is appropriate for the student population.

References

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Survey of Teachers' Reading Material Usage and Time Spent on Reading Components

Number of Years Teaching: 0-5 _____ 6-10 _____ 11-15 _____ 16-20 _____ 21+

Grade Currently Teaching: K-1 _____ 2-3 _____ 4-5 (check all that apply)

How many reading classes do you teach a day? _____

How many minutes per week would you say that you use each of the following materials to teach each component of reading?
 (Please note that when approximating instructional time, do not include time spent questioning students, or quizzing/testing students.)

Material	Name or Description of Material	Approximate Minutes Spent (Per Week) Using Each Material to Teach			
		Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Oral Language	Fluency Vocabulary Comprehension
Standard Basal (e.g. Houghton Mifflin Reading)					
Basal Supplements (e.g. English Language Learner Handbook)					
School Bought Supplements (e.g. Voyager)					

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Material	Approximate Minutes Spent (Per Week) Using Each Material to Teach					
	Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Oral Language	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Computer Supplements (e.g. Reading Plus)						
Teacher Bought Supplements (e.g. Lakeshore Ready Made Centers)						
Teacher Made Supplements						

Approximately how many minutes per week do you spend testing all the components of reading (total testing time): _____