

REACTION: SECONDARY STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF TEXTBOOK METASTRUCTURE

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Mateja and Wood have used a logical procedure to determine secondary students' knowledge of the metastructure of a content text. Interestingly, skill in using this metastructure to better understand content information is an ability which content teachers assume that students possess. However, as found in this study, this ability varies from grade to grade and is affected by the student's reading level.

Reading specialists acknowledge the importance of textbook format and typographical aids in enhancing the comprehension of content materials. Although the skill has been accepted as an important one for some time, little instruction has occurred in the elementary or secondary schools to further develop the skill. The procedure used by Mateja and Wood to assess students' use of textbook metastructure is an excellent way for content teachers to assist in the teaching of this necessary skill for content reading. Using their system of xs with pages from the content text, teachers may demonstrate how textbook metastructure provides clues which aid comprehension. Following this demonstration, the students may work in groups using the actual text material and the metastructure to survey the content of the material and develop questions which may be used as guides for reading. Awareness of textbook metastructure will assist students as they survey materials prior to reading.

If students were aware of the textbook metastructure, their ability to identify organizational patterns of text materials would be enhanced. Because content textbooks follow definite organizational patterns (Cheek and Cheek, in preparation) and because students' ability to recognize organizational patterns seems to be beneficial in improving comprehension of text materials (Meyer, Brandt, and Bluth, 1980), this study has specific implications for reading instruction at the secondary level. These include:

- (1) Understanding of textbook metastructure may be a skill which secondary teachers can assist their average and below average readers in developing in order to help them better comprehend their content materials.
- (2) Developing an understanding of textbook metastructure should help students in recognizing the pattern of organization in the text. This in turn should assist in determining which comprehension skills are to be applied to best understand the material.
- (3) Helping content teachers become aware of the textbook metastructure will provide them with a basis for understanding how to help students learn to read content materials.

While research as to the importance of textbook metastructure is only beginning and the relationship of this metastructure to organizational patterns is based more on logic than on research, it appears that these areas are extremely important to improving the reading of secondary content materials. Of course, secondary students who have developed the ability to apply many of the comprehension skills to their content materials use textbook metastructure and the organizational patterns of the text narrative to further their understanding. But the average and below-average readers need more "crutches" to help them comprehend content text material. Perhaps these are the missing links which content teachers need to teach in order for content learning to be an achievable goal for a larger percentage of our secondary students. Textbook metastructure seems to be the logical first step to improving comprehension of content materials!!

REFERENCES

- Cheek, Martha Collins and Cheek, Earl H. "Organizational Patterns: Untapped Resources for Better Reading." In preparation.
- Meyer, Bonnie, J. F.; Brandt, David M.; and Bluth, George J. "Use of Top-Level Structure in Text: Key for Reading Comprehension of Ninth-Grade Students," *Reading Research Quarterly* 16 (1980): 72-103.