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The Influences of Shared Reading on Students' Reading Comprehension and Reading Motivation in a Rural Elementary School in Taiwan

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to explore how much shared reading influenced students' reading comprehension ability and reading motivation, and to understand the teachers' opinions. The participants were 22 fourth graders, 13 fifth graders, and their homeroom teachers in a rural elementary school in Taiwan. The researchers and the teachers chose suitable books, designed the teaching contents, and tried to combine the teaching of reading comprehension strategies into the teaching processes in the program. The study lasted for twelve weeks and the students have two periods (about eighty minutes) of reading classes for the shared reading programs. Reading comprehension assessments and reading motivation questionnaires were used before and after the program. In addition, students' worksheets, reading feedbacks and interviews were used in order to gather more data about the study. The quantitative data showed that all the posttest were higher than the pretests, but only the reading comprehension of the fourth graders' had significant differences. It meant that the shared-book reading program could effectively increase fourth graders' reading comprehension. The qualitative data showed that most of the students enjoyed the programs and the teachers took positive attitudes toward shared reading.

Keywords: reading comprehension, reading motivation, shared reading

Introduction

The Ministry of Education in Taiwan has put emphases on reading instruction because reading can increase the students' abilities and deepen their thoughts. In recent years, Ministry of Education in Taiwan has enforced some reading policies which are very helpful to the children and teenagers. For example, "Focus 300 Elementary Schools' Reading Projects" which has implemented since 2004 was designed for those schools in disadvantaged areas. "Fun Reading 101- - Enhancing the Elementary School and Junior High School Students' Reading Ability" has been practiced since 2008. The Ministry of Education in Taiwan hopes that every citizen can enjoy reading (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Ministry of Education pay much attention to the reading instruction in the schools in the disadvantaged areas, because there are big gaps of reading ability and reading habits between the students in the urban and rural areas. Taking the rural elementary school in this study for example, it is located in a farm village in Chia-Yi County. The kids love to watch TV, playing ball games or go bicycling instead of reading. They spend little time studying or reading in their free time. Many children live with their grandparents because their parents went to the city to earn money. If the children can spend more time reading, perhaps they will enjoy reading and have different views of many things because reading can open windows of the world for the children.

On the other hand, shared reading is proved to be helpful to improve children's reading ability in many studies. Based on the reading policies of Ministry of Education, it's worthy of trying shared reading in this rural school to see if it can help the children. Therefore, the purposes of this study were as follows:

- To explore the influences of shared reading on students' reading comprehension ability
- To explore the influences of shared reading on students' reading motivation
- To understand the teachers' opinions on shared reading

Literature Review

About Shared Reading

Holdaway (1979) introduced and developed the important activity of shared book experience. This activity has become known as shared reading in recent years (Smith & Elley, 1994, cited from Campbell, 2001). Since shared reading is usually done with students who are just getting started with literacy, it is a time when teachers can share the love of reading, plus teach fundamental concepts and strategies that students need to learn if they are going to become readers and writers (Taberski, 2000). Shared reading activities may occur around Big Books, predictable books, and/or books with simple, clear text and pictures (Erickson, & Hanser, 2007).

Shared reading is an activity typically done in a small group with an adult Shared reading out loud with beginning reader, similar to read-alouds. Yet, the important difference between read-alouds and shared reading is the visibility of the print. The print used for shared reading is sufficiently large so that it can be "seen, shared and discussed" (Holdaway, 1979, p.64, cited from Campbell, 2001). Therefore, using bog books or big charts is very important in shared reading.

There are four steps of shared-book experience, including observing demonstrations, participation, role-playing practice, and performance (Holdaway, 1986). In the process of shared reading, repeated readings are important and children are actively involved in the reading (Yaden, 1988). There are two main purposes of shared reading. One is to provide children with an enjoyable experience, introduce them to a variety of authors, illustrators and types of texts to entice them to become readers. The other is to teach children the reading process and teach systematically and explicitly how to be readers and writers themselves (Parkes, 2000).

Related studies

Zucker, Justice, Piasta and Kaderavek (2010) examined the extent to which preschool teachers used literal and inferential questions during classroom-based shared reading. Participants included 25 preschool teachers and 159 four-year-old children. Teachers videotaped their whole-class shared reading of an informational narrative text. Teachers and children's extra-textual talk was analyzed and children completed standardized vocabulary assessments in fall and spring of the academic year. Results suggest that preschool teachers can use inferential questioning to encourage children to participate in conversation at complex, inferential levels; informational texts appear to provide a successful context for this inferential discourse.

Rodriguez, Hines, and Montiel (2009) investigated the communication behaviors and interactive reading strategies used by Mexican American mothers of low- and middle-socioeconomic status (SES) background during shared book reading. Twenty Mexican American mother-child dyads from the Southwestern United States were observed during two book reading sessions. The data were coded across a number of communication behavior categories and were analyzed using the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999). Results showed that Mexican American mothers used a variety of communication behaviors during shared book reading with their preschool children. Significant differences between the SES groups regarding the frequency of specific communication behaviors were revealed. There were no significant differences between the SES groups regarding the frequency of interactive reading strategies. The researcher suggested that parent literacy programs supplement Mexican American mothers' communication behaviors and interactive reading strategies to improve effectiveness and participation.

In Blewitt, Rump, Shealy, & Cook's study (2009), shared book reading was used to help 3-year-olds learn unfamiliar words. During shared book reading, two experiments explored the impact of cognitive demand level, placement, and an approximation were used to scaffolding. These results are unique in experimentally demonstrating the value for word learning of shifting from less to more challenging input over time. Discussion focuses on why a scaffolding-like procedure improves children's acquisition of elaborated word meanings.

Tsou and Hung (2008) tried to implement shared reading two elementary schools in Taiwan to see how the students' English learning was affected by the program. The study was administrated to two classes in an urban area of south Taiwan, including one fourth grade and one fifth grade. The results indicated that students significantly improved their ability in reading proficiency, learning enjoyment and classroom participation.

Besides, there were some studies on the lower graders in Taiwan. Lin's study (2007)

implemented an experimental teaching program of shared reading and investigated its effects on the first graders' word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The result showed that the shared reading teaching significantly enhanced the students' reading fluency. Li's study (2007) tried to focus on the second graders to see how shared reading affected the second graders' reading comprehension and reading motivation. The results showed that shared-book reading could enhance students' reading comprehension ability. In Lin's study (2008), the effect of shared reading on the third graders' writing ability was explored. The result showed that shared reading was helpful to make the students understand the writing skills and enhance the students' writing ability. In short, shared reading can facilitate young children's vocabulary growth. In short, based on the above studies, shared reading was helpful to students' learning.

As for reading motivation, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found that gender differences make girls have high means on two dimensions of reading motivation (self-efficacy and importance) and in social reasons for reading while boys had higher means on the competition dimension. Li (1998) did a study in Taiwan and found that girls have stronger reading motivation than boys. Besides, Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) also found grade differences and pointed out the fourth graders have stronger reading motivation than the fifth graders. Gambrell, Palmer, and Colding (1996) found that the third graders have stronger reading motivation than the fifth graders.

Method

Participants

The participants were 22 fourth graders, 13 fifth graders, and two teachers. One of the teachers was a male teacher who had taught for about 15 years, and the other was a female teacher who had taught for five years.

Instruments

Reading Comprehension Test (Ko, 1999) was used to test the improvement of students' reading comprehension ability. Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) was used to test the changes of students' reading motivation. Both instruments were used as pretests and posttests. Meanwhile, the experimental teaching lasted for six weeks.

Data collection

Besides the Reading Comprehension Test (Ko, 1999) and Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), Questionnaires of Reading Activities created by the researchers were used for the students to fill out at the end of the experimental teaching. The interviews of teachers and students were collected, analyzed, and compared in order to deeper understanding of the results.

Process

The researchers invited the teachers to form a teaching team. Second, the researchers did the teaching training for the teachers to make them get better understanding of shared reading, including the activities of lecturing, reading groups, and workshops. Then, the teachers chose the books and designed the program together.

The pretests were implemented before the shared reading teaching started. The teaching processes of shared reading were recorded and to be discussed in the teachers' discussion time. Meanwhile, students' worksheets and interviews were collected.

When the teaching program came to an end, the posttests were implemented and followed by interviews. Finally, all the data were gathered and analyzed.

Limitation

Because this elementary school was a small school in the rural area, there was only one class in each grade. As a result, although it was an experimental teaching, there were only experimental groups, no controlled groups. Besides, the study was done in a small rural school, so the results could be expressed only regional aspects. Yet, at least this study could contribute some for the teachers and researchers for reference.

Results and Discussions

I. About Reading Comprehension Ability

The mean of the fourth graders' reading comprehension pretest is 72.05, and the mean of their posttest is 80.23 (table 1). The mean increases 8.18, and it makes a significant difference by the t-test ($t=.862$, $p=.406$, table 2). It shows that shared-book reading is efficient in enhancing the fourth graders' reading comprehension ability. As for the fifth graders, their reading comprehension pretest is 72.31, and the mean of their posttest is 76.15 ($t=.2324$, $p=.030$, table 1). The mean increases 3.84, but it does not make a significant difference by the t-test ($t=.862$, $p=.406$, table 2). That is, the shared reading program does not significantly enhance the fifth graders' reading comprehension.

Table 1 Mean of Pretests and Posttests on Reading Comprehension

Grade	Tests	Mean	N	SD
Fourth	pretest	72.05	22	15.404
	posttest	80.23	22	14.182
Fifth	pretest	72.31	13	16.660
	posttest	76.15	13	17.097

Table 2 T-test of Reading Comprehension

Grade	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	p
Fourth	22	8.182	3.521	21	2.324	.030
Fifth	13	3.846	16.093	12	.862	.406

II. About Reading Motivation

Look at table 3 and table 4. The mean of the fourth graders' reading motivation pretest is 71.41, and the mean of their posttest is 73.59 (table 3). The mean increases 2.18, and it does not make a significant difference by the t-test ($t=1.226$, $p=.234$, table 4). That is, the shared reading program enhances the students' reading motivation a little, but does not make an efficient difference. The same situation happens in the fifth graders' reading motivation. The mean of the fifth graders' reading motivation pretest is 60.54, and the mean of their posttest is 67.38 (table 3). The mean increases 6.84, and it does not make a significant difference by the t-test ($t=1.972$, $p=.072$, table 4).

Table 3 Mean of Pretests and Posttests on Reading Motivation

Grade	Tests	Mean	N	SD
Fourth	pretest	71.41	22	8.040
	posttest	73.59	22	7.129
Fifth	pretest	60.54	13	13.138
	posttest	67.38	13	7.995

Table 4 T-test of Reading Motivation

Grade	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	p
Fourth	22	2.182	8.347	21	1.226	.234
Fifth	13	6.846	12.516	12	1.972	.072

Comparing the fourth graders' reading motivation with the fifth graders', the averages of the fourth graders pretest (71.41) and posttest (73.59) are higher than the fifth graders' (pretest=60.54, posttest=67.38). This is consistent with the findings of Cambrell, Palmer, and Colding (1996), Gurthrie and Wigfield (1997), Li (1999) and Huang (2002). Children's reading motivation declines with ages. In short, the posttests of fourth and fifth graders' reading comprehension tests are higher than the pretests, but only the fourth graders' shows distinguished difference. The posttests of fourth and fifth graders' reading motivation tests are higher than the pretests, but they don't show distinguished difference.

III. Students' Feedbacks

In order to understand how the students feel about the teaching, questionnaires of the shared-book reading program were filled out by the students after the teaching program. The findings were as the followings.

1. The students enjoyed the shared reading program.

From table 5, we could see that most of the students enjoy the shared-book reading. The students got pleasure and achievement from the share-reading program. Besides, the fourth graders seemed to enjoy more than the fifth graders. In answering the question "I enjoy the reading activities this semester.", 87% if the fourth graders chose "Strongly agree" while 77% of the fifth graders had the same choice. 13% of the fourth graders chose "Agree" while 15% of the fifth graders did, too. In other words, all of the fourth graders and 92% of the fifth graders liked the programs.

2. The fourth graders were more enthusiastic in participating the activities than the fifth graders.

When asked if "I enjoy discussion with others", 67% of the fourth graders and 38.5% of the fifth graders chose "Strongly agree", and 21% of the fourth graders and 38.5% of the fifth graders chose "Agree". That was, 88% of the fourth graders enjoyed discussion with others, but 77% of the fifth graders did. The fourth graders liked to discussed with others and doing the self-check list carefully. They were more enthusiastic than the fifth graders. Most of the fourth graders thought they actively take part in the activities and paid attention to others.

Table 5 Results of Questionnaire of shared-book reading

questions	item grade	Strongly	Somewhat	No	Somewhat	Strongly
		agree	agree	opinion	disagree	disagree
I enjoy the reading activities this semester.	fourth	87%	13%	0%	0%	0%
	fifth	77%	15%	8%	0%	0%
I enjoy discussion with others.	fourth	67%	21%	12%	0%	0%
	fifth	38.5%	38.5%	23%	0%	0%
I work hard when joining the reading activities.	fourth	75%	21%	4%	0%	0%
	fifth	62%	38%	0%	0%	0%
I enjoy reading more than before.	fourth	74%	21%	5%	0%	0%
	fifth	46%	46%	8%	0%	0%
The reading activities this semester are very helpful to me.	fourth	78%	22%	0%	0%	0%
	fifth	54%	46%	0%	0%	0%

IV. Teacher's opinion

1. Before the teaching program, the teachers had high expectation to shared-book reading.

The teachers were willing to try new teaching method. The researcher tried to show the previous studies to the teacher and persuaded them to join the teaching. In the interviews, the researcher found that teachers often let the students read themselves because of the limited teaching time and the pressure of teaching schedule. In this case, "*the students usually read some paragraphs or just looked at the pictures. It was hard for them to figure out the true meanings in the contents, not mention to share the reading reactions*" (20090202/ interview T1/ p.1, L11-12). Therefore, "*I hope that I can change the students' reading habits by joining the shared-book reading program. I think that teaching children how to reading will be the most useful thing for them.*" (20090202/ interview T1/ p.1, L17-19), T1 said. For T2, she thought that "*The students who borrowed books from the library were those who enjoyed reading. The others enjoyed playing seldom read or borrowed books. If shared-book reading can make the students read more and enjoy more, I would like to try.*" (20090202/ interview T2/ p.2, L10-12), T2 said. In a word, the teachers had expectation to the shared-reading because they hoped that it could make the students enjoy reading.

2. After the implementation of the reading program, the teachers had a positive attitude towards shared-book reading because the student really made progress in reading, writing, speaking, thinking and attitude.

Word recognition and the understanding of the contents in the textbooks had been the important parts in language art classes in this school. Teachers in this school seldom noticed students' reading attitude and reading motivation. However, after the training program of shared-book reading, the teachers paid attention not only to students' achievement, but also reading motivation and reading attitude. They did have some findings.

One of the teachers found that shared-book reading helped the students improve their thinking and writing. For example, "*Student #7 merely liked to copy the writing instead of thinking. Whenever making the sentences, he felt awful and wanted to run away from the class. I couldn't do anything but asked him to consult other classmates' work. However, at the end of this semester, near the end of the shared reading program, I suddenly found that this kid could write down the summary. I was so surprised that I asked if he did it himself. He gave a positive answer. It was amazing.*" (20090611 interview T2). What the student did was not only thinking and writing, but also the way he dealt with the reading assignment. In the past, he seemed to lack ability and motivation to do the reading work, but now he was willing to read and write and then did a much better job than before.

Besides, "*the grades of student #5, #9, #10, #11, and #13 were below the average. They would try hard to finish the homework, but they couldn't did a good job in reflective assignments. After the ten-week reading program, their thinking ability seemed increasing and multiple. They didn't follow other opinions as usual. Instead, they expressed their own ideas or feedbacks*" (20090611 Interview T2, p.3, L4-8) .

On the other hand, there was a big change in the students' behaviors. "*Students #1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 21, and 22 didn't like to read and seldom went to the libraries. Yet, they often go to the school library to read and borrowed books now. That's a great change*" (20090611

Interview T1) ”. Not only the students with low-achievement change a lot, but also the high-level student made progress. *“Student #6 usually did a good job at tests, but he was not willing to read outside reading, including the storybooks. However, his attitude is very different now. Whenever there’s introduction for the new books, he will ask me if we’re going to the library today because he wants to borrow the book. Now, I don’t have to remind him to read. Instead, he has strong willing to read himself. (20090611 Interview T2, p.4, L1-4) ”.*

When the two teachers talked about the students’ progress, they smiled and seemed proud of them. It seemed that the students’ great changes made them satisfied and have confidence in shared-reading.

3. The teachers are will to try shared-book reading next semester because it is both helpful to students’ reading and learning, and the teachers’ teaching.

They feel satisfied with the students’ efforts and improvement. Besides, the teachers found the importance of preparation, review, and shared reading through the implementation of the share-reading program. *“Re-reading makes me aware of the importance and function of review. In the past, I reviewed the lessons with the children only before the monthly tests, so the students’ impressions and understanding were not deep enough. The experience of trying shared-reading gives me a good opportunity to check and reflect my own teaching, especially some parts that I often neglect (20090526 Interview T2). ”* As for T1, he had positive attitude toward shared-reading program. *“Shared reading makes it easy for me to find the students’ problems. It provides more chances for me to train the students speak in public. I find the students can learn more with the peers’ sharing (20090526 Interview T1). ”*

When asked if they would like to keep on trying shared-reading, they both gave confirmative answers. *“Since shared-reading helps the students a lot, I’ll certainly keep on using it (20090611 Interview T1).”* T1 said. *“I tried many new things in the teaching program. I see the students’ improvement. Yet, actually I myself make progress, too. Therefore, I would like to use shared-reading next semester (20090611 Interview T2)”.*

Conclusions & Suggestions

In short, shared-book reading can effectively increase fourth graders’ reading comprehension. The teachers and students take a positive attitude toward shared-book reading. They feel that shared-reading is not only helpful to the students’ learning but also useful to their own teaching.

Based on the finding, some suggestions are followed. First, since shared-reading is helpful to the learning and teaching, it would be better if more teachers and students join the teaching and learning. Therefore, the related issues of shared-reading are good choices to be added in the teachers training program in order to make more teachers familiar with it. Second, big books and small books are important tools in the process of shared-reading, the administrators of schools should make some budget for the purchase of books.

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