

Critical Review:
Does Narrative Instruction Improve Reading Comprehension in Children with Learning Disabilities?

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This critical review examines the literature measuring the effectiveness of explicit narrative instruction in improving reading comprehension in children with learning disabilities (LD). Study designs include: literature review [1], single-subject 'n of 1' [1], and multiple-baseline [2]. Reference to additional sources was used for background information within this paper. Overall, the evidence gathered from this review is positive. Further experimental investigation is required to determine if narrative instruction is effective in improving reading comprehension. Clinical implications and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Introduction

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Methods

Search Strategy

Articles related to the topic of interest were found using the following computerized databases: ProQuest, PsychINFO, Google Scholar, and PubMed. Keywords used for the database search were as follows: [(Story grammar) OR (narrative instruction) OR (story structure) OR (narrative structure) OR (text structure) OR (narrative text) AND (reading) AND (reading comprehension) AND (school aged) OR (students)]

to LD. The studies included were principally single-subject designs thus generalization is difficult to extrapolate to the larger population. A meta-analysis is not possible given that there are no randomized control studies on the topic. The research evidence indicates that students with LD do benefit from explicit narrative instruction with increases in reading comprehension.

Overall, Stetter & Hughes suggest that a considerable amount of experimental research be conducted in order to determine the effect of narrative instruction for students with LD as the causal relationship as of yet, remains unknown. They also suggest comparative studies of story grammar and other comprehension strategies in order to evaluate the different types of intervention.

data was collected at each phase through indirect observations, percentage of correctly identified items on completed story maps, and a student questionnaire. A story-retelling task was included to compare performance with written tasks.

Gardil & Jittendra (1999) clearly described the experimental procedures of the study. They described many important factors such as: the materials used, teaching scripts, scoring protocols, the phases of the study, criterion for initiating the next phase, intervention fidelity during baseline and intervention sessions, and interscorer reliability. The reading passages were taken from the Silver, Burdette, and Ginn (fifth-and sixth grade) Basal Reading Program that was employed in the school board. The researchers used different reading materials during the instruction and testing phases.

Percent correct scores on story grammar and comprehension questions were calculated for all participants at each phase. Mean percentage scores on comprehension measures were calculated as well.

A detailed analysis of each participant's performance was provided. Improvements in reading comprehension were observed for all six children. Incorporating direct instruction and practice facilitated comprehension. The percentage of correct story grammar elements and comprehension increased from baseline to intervention. Effects were maintained for two weeks post-intervention.

One limitation of this study was that the authors used means to compare participants, which may be an overestimate of their performance. The data was descriptive and functional relationships could not be established between performance and story mapping or comprehension. Another limitation is the small number of participants; which reduces the confidence in the results. Also, one participant had a concomitant condition that may have affected her performance. There is no description of the reading passages (i.e., length, topic). Instruction was provided in pairs, outside of the classroom, and teachers used structured scripts. This is not representative of typical classroom instruction or inclusive practice. It is unclear whether structured instruction or small working groups contributed to reading comprehension.

A strength of this study was that it replicated previous findings and suggested a new critical variable: practice time. Additional practice time was found to be beneficial in promoting identification of story grammar

A strength of this study was that it provided a detailed data analysis and standardized tests were used to monitor progress.

Considering the strengths and limitations, this study demonstrates suggestive evidence for the use of story mapping in improving reading comprehension.

Discussion

The purpose of this review was to examine the effects of direct narrative instruction on reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities. The literature to date suggests that narrative instruction can improve reading comprehension. While all of the reviewed studies provided a positive outcome, there were methodological limitations within these studies. Results should be interpreted with caution.

The research designs were not truly experimental. Groups were not randomized, and there were no control groups. This can produce biased results and as a result they cannot be generalized without robust research evidence.

It is recommended that greater consistency in the testing material be implemented to minimize the variability and improve the generalizability of results across studies.

Another limitation is that the studies were all out of the United States school system. Educational boards and districts vary in the services provided and the students that attend. These considerations may limit the applicability of the results.

Finally, it is important to consider the limited sample group sizes. The small sample sizes limits the level of statistical power that can be attributed to the results.

Future research would be beneficial to provide additional information to better answer the research question posed in this paper. In order to improve the level of evidence provided by the existing literature, it is recommended that future research take the following into consideration:

1. Studies should consider increasing the sample sizes. Results will have more statistical power and be more generalizable. This would result in greater applicability to clinical practice.
2. Future research should endeavor to replicate and validate the worth of narrative instruction for improving reading comprehension.
3. Greater experimental control is needed to evaluate

narrative instruction, reading comprehension, and participant selection.

4. Studies should include a more naturalistic intervention approach. Instruction should occur in a classroom setting rather than a pull-out, individual approach.

Clinical Implications

While there are some limitations to these studies, there are also some important clinical implications to be

