Stories of obstacles and success: Teachers' experiences in professional development of reading comprehension instruction

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Abstract

We carried out a qualitative, multiple case study to explore the challenges and successes teachers encounter while participating in a professional development program aimed at improving their reading comprehension instruction. We documented five fifth grade teachers' experiences as they participated in a year-long professional development program geared towards improving their comprehension instruction. Teachers frequently faced obstacles related to texts, classroom management, instructional decisions, their students, time, and assessment issues. However, the teachers did report changes in their thinking and teaching. We also observed positive growth in their reading comprehension instruction, as well as growth in their students' reading comprehension behaviors.

Stories of Obstacles and Success: Teachers' Experiences in Professional Development of Reading Comprehension Instruction

Teachers can teach their students to be active comprehenders (Pressley et al., 1992), to use the strategies that typify mature reading in a self-regulated fashion (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). These strategies include making predictions about the content of text based on prior knowledge, asking and answering questions, making inferences as reading proceeds, constructing mental images consistent with the relationships mentioned in text, seeking clarification when confused, and summarizing (Pressley, 2000). This strategy use occurs before, during, and after reading the text. The use of such comprehension strategies permits readers to extract and construct meaning from text.

Effective reading comprehension instruction typically begins with modeling and explaining of strategies by a teacher, followed by student practice, with the teacher providing support and re-instruction as needed by students (Duffy, 2003). Such scaffolding of comprehension strategies use can include many reminders to use the strategies being taught. A semester to a year of such instruction can produce large gains in comprehension that can be detected on standardized reading tests (Anderson, 1992; Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Collins, 1991).

That teachers can teach comprehension strategies does not mean that teacher attempts at comprehension strategies instruction are always successful. Indeed, it has been known for some time that strategies instruction is challenging for many teachers (Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet, Zajchowski, & Evans, 1989). Based on the research literature available in 1989 and personal experiences teaching strategies to students, Pressley and colleagues (1989) detailed a number of

the challenges associated with teaching strategies, which included the following: Teachers often do not understand that reading should be active in the ways specified by comprehension strategies. Thus, such active reading often looks very different from their customary reading, which often is a linear reading of text from beginning to end. Modeling, explaining, and scaffolding of strategies use are very demanding teaching processes, with teachers needing to be highly motivated if they are to deliver such instruction with the intensity required for students to become self-regulated users of comprehension strategies. The number of individual strategies to be taught can seem overwhelming to teachers. Typically, it takes a long while before students can use the strategies without at least some support from the teacher (i.e., strategies maintenance develops slowly). In addition, students differ in ways that affect their ability to use strategies, with differences in short-term memory capacity and world knowledge often effecting whether comprehension strategies can be used successfully or not. Since 1989, there have been consistent reports that comprehension strategies instruction is challenging for teachers to the point that they cannot or do not learn how to teach the strategies (Klingner, Vaughn, Arguelles, Hughes, & Leftwich, 2004; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Mason, 2004; Pressley & El-Dinary, 1997). Perhaps that accounts, in part, for the fact that comprehension strategies are not being taught in school extensively (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000).

This is despite the fact that there is unprecedented pressure to teach comprehension strategies in school. For example, teaching comprehension is one of the five factors mandated for beginning reading instruction in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (107th Congress, 2002). In addition, use of effective comprehension strategies by the end of the elementary grades is increasingly specified in state standards documents, including in the language arts standards in

Michigan, where this study was conducted (Michigan Department of Education, 2005). This is also despite the fact that there are now many, many resources for teachers who want to learn how to do strategies instruction (e.g., Blachowicz & Ogle, 2002; Harvey & Goudvis, 2001, Keene & Zimmermann, 1997).

The exceptional conceptual progress that the field has made with respect to understanding the nature of effective comprehension strategies instruction served as a stimulus for this study. We wanted to know in as much detail as possible the challenges faced by teachers learning to teach comprehension strategies in 2003-04. We expected the challenges might be different than they were in the Pressley et al. (1989) study because of the subsequent research on comprehension strategies instruction and development of materials to support such instruction. Our window on comprehension strategies instruction was to provide professional development to middle school teachers that was intended to improve their understanding of comprehension strategies instruction and lead to competence and commitment to teach such strategies. As we worked with the teachers, we monitored carefully the challenges they were facing as well as how and whether they successfully negotiated those challenges.

Method

Participants

Pressley had worked with the middle schools the previous year on a study of students' motivation. He then was contacted by the principals who were interested in improving their teachers' comprehension instruction. After discussing the schools' needs, we decided to offer a professional development program to the teachers at both schools. While over 20 teachers expressed initial interest in participating in the study, (i.e., by showing up to the first informational meeting) only five teachers committed to working with us over the course of the

school year. A group of approximately 10 teachers were peripheral participants in the program, who attended occasionally throughout the program. When questioned about their reasons for declining to participate, we received the following most common responses: too many other school commitments; time conflicts; the program would be too invasive in their classroom and too time-consuming; and previous attendance at another professional development program required by their district that had included reading comprehension instruction training.

We worked with the five fully participating teachers from October through April in the 2003-4 school year. These teachers all taught fifth grade in two fifth/sixth grade schools in a small school district in Michigan. All of the teachers had taught ten years or more except for one who had taught for approximately five years. The participating teachers had varied experiences with professional development geared towards improving literacy instruction, including a district-provided class on effective literacy instruction,

Three of the five fully participating teachers, Lori, Sandra, and Pat[1] taught at Humbolt Middle School. Humbolt served a working class neighborhood. The school was an older one, built in the 1950s or 60s. The principal, while he showed initial interest in the program and helped in recruiting teachers, often could not participate in the after school meetings. He told us that he wanted the professional development program for the teachers in his school as a way to improve students' standardized tests scores.

The other two fully participating teachers, Lois, and Mark taught at Lincoln Middle School. This school served a more affluent section of the same community. The school had recently been built and was designed around the library, which mirrored the schools' focus on improving students' literacy. The principal greatly encouraged this goal and attended the

[1] Names of schools and teachers have been altered to protect their identities.

majority of our after-school meetings where she was involved in the conversations, offering encouragement and questions to the teachers.

Procedures

We carried out a qualitative study to understand the challenges teachers encounter when participating in a professional development program aimed at improving their reading comprehension.

Professional Development Program. One or both authors met with the participating teachers, as a group, approximately every four to six weeks depending on the teachers' schedules. These meetings consisted of informal lessons about aspects of reading comprehension, such as learning about different strategies, comprehension of informational texts, and the scaffolding process that supports students as they implement a new strategy. The teachers also received two texts that supported their learning in these sessions (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2002; Keene & Zimmermann, 1997).

The meetings also provided time for teachers to problem solve with us and each other about issues they were dealing with in their classrooms as they attempted to teach and encourage use of comprehension strategies. One example occurred when Lori discussed using cue words to teach non-fiction texts. Sandra referred her to a teacher in the building who had previously made charts and had examples of different texts with different structures. The teachers were constantly sharing information and referring each other to teachers who could provide assistance on specific needs. When the teachers at Lincoln Middle School were complaining about the lack of "good" informational texts, Lois suggested using informational magazine articles geared towards students. Other teachers in the school adapted these texts that Lois shared with success. Mark provided another example of collaborative problem-solving. He had tried out a series of

visualization lesson where he had students illustrate scenes from *Hatchet* (Paulsen, 1989). The lessons did not go as planned and so we spent a half hour working one-on-one with him by revisiting the lesson's goals and discussing how he could achieve those same goals but with a different instructional approach. We also discussed how he had been implicitly modeling the strategies during his read-alouds and how he could begin to focus explicitly on the strategies in a more systematic way.

We were open with the teachers about our purpose in the study, to examine the challenges and successes they faced in trying this new way of teaching. As a result, some of our whole-group discussion time focused around the challenges and successes experienced by the teachers. In addition, we also observed each classroom approximately once a month, depending on the teachers' needs and schedules. The observer would then give feedback to the teacher about his or her instruction. During these feedback sessions we would discuss progress made in teaching comprehension strategies, make suggestions for improvement, and reflect on future directions the professional development should take. This "coaching" often occurred as informal conversations after the lesson, phone calls, and e- mails.

Data Collection and Analysis. The primary source of data was our field notes, with the principal focus during note taking being challenges in teaching---ones the observers witnessed or teachers related in their comments. We took extensive field notes during our classroom observations (17 by Hilden, 19 by Pressley) and professional development meetings (18 over the course of the study) as well as during many informal interviews (e.g., at the completion of an observation, during the professional development meetings). Teachers from both schools resisted being video or audio-taped. However, they readily accepted our note-taking. In fact, Lois would

often point to our notebooks and tell us, "Make sure you get this down," especially when we discussed with her the challenges she faced when teaching.

The first author analyzed the data using the method of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where she examined the sources of data to identify categories that exhaustively accounted for obstacles and successes associated with this professional development program. Once an initial inventory of challenges and successes had been developed, the second author, an expert in the field of reading comprehension instruction, conducted an audit to ensure that all of the categories and sub-categories that he observed had been identified by Hilden. Pressley also edited the notes to reduce sources of redundancy within the categories. The results section first details the challenges and then takes up the benefits and successes the participating teachers experienced.

Results

Challenges and Obstacles

Teacher attitudes. Some of the participating teachers expressed doubts about whether they needed professional development in comprehension strategies instruction. Two of the three fully participating teachers at Humboldt had attended the district-level class on literacy instruction, which included reading Keene and Zimmermann's (1998) *Mosaic of Thought*, one of the texts given to the teachers as they participated in professional development. Sandra, in particular, pointed out at the first meeting that she has "already done *Mosaic of Thought.*" She went on to relate that, "We are competent people. All we need is one last trick." Of course, as we talked with her about the trick she needed, what she wanted to know was how to teach the strategies so students could use them in a self-regulated fashion (which, of course, is the whole

point of comprehension strategies instruction). When we observed Sandra's teaching early in the study, we saw little evidence of this happening.

One teacher, who attended the professional development meetings from time to time, indicated a general mistrust of professional development. She told us, "The district has tried a lot of different things and programs, and they don't always stick with us and they don't seem to work. We just want something that has proven to work." Mark also echoed these sentiments early in the year.

Three of the full-year participants had not had previous exposure to comprehension strategies instruction. The novelty of the approach proved challenging to these teachers. As Lois remarked during a whole group meeting, "I am a learner [along with my students] in this, too." During her observations, Lois often made remarks such as, "Show me," and, "Am I doing this right?" Lois was very concerned that her teaching have a positive impact on the students, which seemed to contribute to her lack of confidence in her teaching of the strategies. Mark, who had the additional challenge of teaching fifth grade for only the second year, reported that he had trouble juggling his need to familiarize himself with the grade-5 literature and learning to teach comprehension strategies. We attempted to meet these teachers' needs by modeling small and whole group instruction and showing the teachers videos of exemplary reading comprehension instruction.

Sometimes teachers were reluctant to try specific teaching approaches we recommended, with this reluctance stemming from several sources. Thus, after we encouraged teaching strategies in literature circles, Lori commented that, "I've heard that they [literature circles] can be a big flop, but we'll see." That is, input from other teachers sometimes conflicted with input we provided. Rather than objecting to specific practices, Mark indicated a general hesitancy to

get started on teaching strategies early in the year. Eventually, he came to believe that, "I guess I just need to jump in the pool and get wet." After experiencing some initial success with teaching the strategies and receiving some support from us, Mark did try teaching the strategies across a variety of content and through use of a number of the specific teaching mechanisms discussed in the whole group sessions.

Designing whole group professional development sessions proved challenging, specifically, sessions that worked both with the strategies instruction novices and those with some previous exposure to comprehension strategies instruction. We had to individualize our attention to each teacher's needs as part of the overall professional development. Much of this occurred by having informal conversations with each teacher after an observation, with comments made to the teachers about their own instruction that we had observed.

Instructional decision-making. Perhaps the largest and most frequently reported instructional challenge that teachers faced was how to embed the reading comprehension instruction within their larger literacy and content area instruction. For instance, during our time with the teachers, they frequently asked about how this type of instruction could improve their students' writing skills. Thus, when we discussed using graphic organizers to help students see different structures in informational texts, one teacher commented that she could really see how she could "turn the strategy over" and use it to help students organize their informational writing. In the first half of the year, Lori commented that, "I'm in a bind. There is so much to do during literacy that this [teaching informational texts during reading instruction] got put on the back-burner. Something has got to give". This was a common sentiment among many of the teachers that we worked with.

In addition to integrating the reading comprehension instruction within a larger literacy program, the teachers also wondered how to incorporate this type of instruction across their curriculum. Lori found an interesting way to embed strategy use with nonfiction texts into her literacy instruction, while also incorporating social studies lessons. When the children read "*From the mixed-up files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*" (Konigsburg, 1987), Lori turned the students many questions about New York City into a whole-class inquiry project about Manhattan and large cities. This activity incorporated maps, museum guides, picture books, and even guest speakers.

Another set of challenges that the teachers encountered was how to gradually turn over responsibility of a strategy to the students. Mark jokingly reported that when he first turned over a strategy to students working in book clubs that, "chaos" reigned. Over the next several weeks he provided more structure and accountability (i.e., graphic organizers, student roles, journal entries) to the students' responses in order to support and scaffold his students' attempts to discuss their strategies with one another. In fact, several teachers asked about various formats they could use to have students' document their responses to reading. Many of the ideas from Blachowicz and Ogle's book (2001) and McLaughlin and Allen's book (2002) proved helpful. However, we were always careful to stress that while these written responses and organizers were a helpful teaching tool, they represented only one step in the process of getting students to use the strategies independently, to use them mentally as they read. Thus, we stressed that good adult readers certainly call upon their prior knowledge, ask questions, and summarize newly learned information, but they rarely write out a formal KWL chart while attacking a book.

The teachers also experienced that there has to be variety in strategies instruction. Mark asked us, "How do I keep my instruction fresh in order to keep the students engaged?" He did so

because in one of his lessons, he asked students to visualize and then draw out what they were seeing in their minds as he read from Paulsen's *Hatchet* (1989). As Mark put it, "It was good for the first chapters but now they're just scribbling something down and turning it in after three minutes." Thus, the teachers had to be creative and have many different avenues for their students to actively engage in creating their understanding of a book.

The teachers also struggled, especially at the beginning of the program, with how to teach the strategies explicitly. One teacher shared that she had been teaching strategies for years but was not using the terminology or teaching the students how to use the strategies themselves, "But I don't use the terms and talk about why I'm saying what I'm saying". We encouraged the teachers to explain their modeling and use of strategies, emphasizing that the more students understand the strategies, the more likely they are to use them (Duffy, 2003).

Finally, the teachers struggled to meet the diverse needs of their students. They all reported that the students' comprehension was growing at different rates and that this was a challenge they faced. While we spent much of our time in meetings discussing how to improve the struggling readers' comprehension, Mark pointed out that he also had difficulty motivating his strong readers to be active in their reading. "My highest kids are the fastest. They are more difficult to motivate and want to do the bare minimum. They get bored."

Texts. One teacher commented that not only did she have to figure out how she was going to teach a strategy, she also had to think about what to teach it with. This comment reflected the complex and difficult nature of designing purposeful instruction with the texts available for students to read. Most salient, teachers at both schools lamented the poorly written informational texts that they had in their libraries and as textbooks. This was important since the teachers felt that the strategies were especially applicable to informational texts. They reported

that it was hard to keep their students motivation and attention when modeling the strategies with these texts. Many of the teachers (who had access to them) supplemented these dry texts with short, interesting articles from news magazines geared towards students' interest and reading abilities.

Throughout the year, we emphasized having students practice the strategies with texts at their instructional level. We felt that it would make most sense to apply strategies to texts with some level of challenge, although ones not so far beyond the student that extensive teacher support would be needed for the students to read the texts at all. At Humbolt Middle School, the teachers reported difficulty in finding books at the instructional level for many students, since a large proportion of the students were reading at grade-5 level or lower. As Sandra at Humboldt put it, "We have the library for sixth and seventh graders not fifth graders. We keep banging out heads. It has some fifth grade texts but not second to fifth grade." Another teacher admitted that, "We are buying our own books because the book room and the library doesn't have what we need." The principal and reading specialist answered their plea by using some funds to supplement the book room with much needed lower-level texts. However, Sandra also pointed out that sometimes it was difficult to have students practice their strategies with lower-level text, due to the lack of complexity in the content and structure. As a result of these texts problems, we spent a great deal of time reflecting with teachers about which texts could be used for strategies lessons and practice.

Challenges associated with students. The greatest student challenge was getting the students to use the strategies being taught on their own, which, of course, was the goal of the professional development. The teachers frequently commented about the lack of self-regulated strategies use by their students. At one professional development meeting, Lois asked, "How do

I get my students to make connections on their own?" (To which we offered suggestions like modeling, charting connections, journaling, and having students discuss connections in guided reading groups.) Later she indicated that she had trouble, "Getting the kids to apply it… but when we practice together, they've got it." Lori shared a similar frustration while working on nonfiction texts, "I still battle with nonfiction. I still have a handful of readers who aren't being active or at least aren't externalizing it."

Lois continued to work on making connections with her students but found specific impediments to her instruction. She reported that her students could not understand the vocabulary in the book they were reading as a class, "[They have] problems with vocabulary, problems with attacking words." Also, Lois reported that her students did not have the appropriate background knowledge and experiences to construct a coherent understanding of a text, "We were talking about Manhattan—my students don't know about subways or big city neighborhoods. My students don't understand what it is. My students have never been to a big city."

Another obstacle to effective reading comprehension instruction was the students' own schema and values about reading. The principal from Lincoln recognized that teaching this way was often difficult for teachers because their students did not have the same values about reading as the teachers did. "The students seem to value reading fast over reading for understanding. That is what they have been taught in the lower grades." Mark provided his own insight, "My class wants nothing more than to finish the book. They value speed over comprehension. I see eyes rolling and slumping in their seats." And indeed, we saw this when we visited his classroom, and he tried to have the students re-read a section that they had misunderstood. We saw many students physically disengage in the lesson by rolling their eyes, groaning, and

pushing their books away. Thus, in order to keep their students engaged in the lesson the teachers had to make sure that the students understood why the strategies were important. As Mark related, “I don’t think they get why they’re asking questions and making the connections [during] re-reading.”

Teachers also indicated problems with individual students who seem to lack motivation no matter what techniques they used. Lori asked us, “What do you do with the kid who hates to read? They won’t monitor, they are just messing around.” Similarly, another teacher asked, “How do I get them more involved? I have this one student. He’s not doing it. He isn’t interested unless I go over there and start pushing him.” The teachers perceived they had students who just refused to use the strategies.

Finally, throughout the study, we were aware that these teachers were teaching large classes. Large class size simply does not work very well when students require a good deal of teacher support to make progress.

Classroom Management. Our teachers occasionally mentioned that management issues interfered with their comprehension instruction. For instance, the teachers indicated that they typically planned their think-aloud and whole group lessons to last not more than twenty minutes, since they had problems keeping their students attention longer than that. Also, while we suggested the benefits of pulling struggling readers to work in guided reading groups and having the students discuss texts together, the teachers often faced the challenge of keeping everyone else on task. During our classroom observations we noted many occasions when students working with the teacher were focused and productive. Meanwhile, many other students were talking off-topic and not involved in the text. In a large group at Humbolt, the teachers came up with the idea of having students turn in an artifact of their learning and

discussions as a way to increase task engagement. We also had conversations at Lincoln around the question of, “What does the rest of my class do while I’m working with a focus group?” This issue was particularly salient with struggling readers since they often needed more scaffolding than other students.

Lois reported that, before participating in the professional development program, she usually focused on one text for the entire class. As she experimented with small groups, she shared that, “It is hard to keep track of everyone, if they are in a different book.” Thus, having small groups meant that Lois had to keep track of four to five texts instead of just one, which increased her planning and assessment load.

Assessment. Towards the end of the program, many teachers began requesting information on informal comprehension assessments. Mark commented that despite improvements in his instruction, “I don’t have a better handle on where the kids are. I struggle with informal assessment. I’d be hard pressed to give an accurate assessment of where they are.” This was a theme we heard from many of the teachers. Similarly, when we asked how the program could be improved in the future, the teachers at Lincoln suggested including information about informal assessments at the beginning of the year because, “This would help us figure out what the kids were able to do at the beginning of the year, which would influence instruction.” In order for teachers to individualize their instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students they need accessible, easy to interpret, quick informal assessments.

Finally, the teachers were concerned with how the professional development would impact their state standardized assessment scores and national standards. Both principals voiced concern about how students improved comprehension could transfer to improved scores on the state standardized tests.

Concerns about Professional Development. In order to provide models of effective comprehension instruction, we occasionally showed videos of exemplary teachers. However, our teachers sometimes indicated the "gaps in reality" between their classrooms and the ones on the videos. After watching one video, Mark remarked, "There is a difference between watching someone doing it, a teacher like in the videos, whose been doing it for years and who has a lot of experience and the kids have been doing it for years before too. When in reality, when I'm working with one group, the rest are goofing off or only talking to each other superficially and doing the least amount required." Thus, our conversations after watching the videos focused on how they could adapt parts of what they saw in the video to their "less than perfect" classrooms.

Typically, we tried to cover a new topic or concept at each whole group meeting. When we asked in March what they wanted to talk about next. Mark said, "It's too much information. I don't know if I'm coming or going. I've hit piecemeal. I try but I don't follow up consistently with it." That is, some of our teachers reached a point where they did not want any new information from us; rather, they preferred to work on synthesizing all of the individual pieces that we had covered. Thus, as researchers involved in providing professional development, we learned that it is crucial that the teachers not feel overwhelmed by the amount of information we cover.

Time. Some teachers also indicated that they did not have sufficient time to deeply read multiple professional texts we provided (i.e., research articles from teacher friendly journals as *Reading Teacher* and books like *Strategies that Work).* One teacher indicated that, "There are too many books. I can't keep up on professional texts. I'm just trying to keep up on the literature for my grade." Thus, we decided to provide these resources as suggestions and readily had them available when teachers asked for readings about a specific topic.

Our teachers also indicated a lack of time to develop curriculum. Lois stated that, "We're flying by the seat of our pants. It's making us nuts. What am I going to do next week? It [comprehension instruction] works but it takes so much time." Similarly, another teacher stated, "This is hard to do everyday. It takes a lot of time." To this concern we said, "It typically takes at least a year to master. You not only change the way you teach but you're also changing the way you think." It did not help that some of the teachers lacked consistent planning periods.

Timing in the curriculum. The teachers were emphatic about the need for comprehension instruction to be consistent across grades, with several stating their fear that what was started in their class would not be continued in the next school year. They wanted comprehension strategies instruction and strategies instruction more generally to start earlier, beginning in the primary grades and continuing beyond the later middle school grades. Thus, Lois focused on the lack of strategies instruction in the earlier grades, remarking that, "Kids don't have word attack skills. And they don't have the strategies they need in the lower end." Lori summed up the teachers concerns about continuity across years when she said, "My 'aha' moment was to loop this instruction and tie the grades together."

Concluding comment on challenges. Learning to teach comprehension strategies was challenging to these teachers. The comprehension strategies instructional decisions that the teachers made were influenced by the diverse needs of their students, the texts they had available to them, and their issues with classroom management. However, despite all of the difficulties, there was evidence of some success in teaching comprehension strategies in these classrooms.

Successes and Benefits

Changes in teachers' thinking and attitudes. The teachers saw how the comprehension strategies mapped onto the state language arts standards. This was important given both schools'

focus on standards based instruction. Beyond that, however, many of the teachers believed that the professional development program taught them new ways of teaching and thinking about reading. For instance, Lori told us that, “This is new for me and it’s expanding my knowledge.” Lois similarly reported changes in the way she read in non-teacher related areas of her life. The teachers also saw the benefits of particular strategies on students’ overall comprehension. Pat reflected that, “I have used all of these [strategies] before except for cause and effect. I can see benefit for having kids analyze structure.”

Mark shared that the comprehension strategies made him feeling more confident in his instruction, “I felt less helpless even when I was being observed. The strategies provided a safety net.” During one lesson we observed, Mark was trying to teach the students to re-read as a fix-up strategy. The students really resisted the lesson and were quickly disengaging. Mark began modeling the questioning strategy, something the students had already covered. As the students began asking questions, he encouraged them to go back and revisit the text to see if they could answer their questions. Thus, he was able to meet the lesson’s goal by flexibly adapting his strategy instruction. After the lesson he told us, “This type of activity helps me but now I have things [strategies] to fall back on, whereas, prior to this, I would have just thrown up my hands.” Similarly, other teachers indicated that, while this type of instruction was difficult to do well, it was, “Worth the effort.”

Changes in teachers’ instruction. The changes in teachers’ thinking resulted in observable differences in their instruction as well. At the beginning of the program we typically saw teacher-student interactions around text follow a basic IRE pattern (Mehan, 1979), when the teacher initiated the student-teacher interaction by asking a question, followed by the student’s response, which the teacher evaluated. The process was then repeated with another student.

During our observations, we saw teachers move more towards a discussion format. For example, in Lois's class, we observed a lesson where students shared different types of connections to the text being read with one another. Lois's role was that of a facilitator of the discussion.

Also, at the beginning of the year, we typically saw the teachers using primarily one narrative text with all the students in the classroom. By the end of March, we saw much more work with nonfiction and also teachers were working more with small groups, with each group having a different leveled text appropriate to the students' reading ability. The teachers also started to shift from thinking about quantity of texts read to thinking about quality of instruction with fewer texts. Thus, Sandra summed it up when she stated that teachers should "stretch books," by spending more time with each one instead of superficially covering many books.

We also observed teachers pushing students to get beyond the superficial when they used strategies. For example, Lois encouraged one student to think more deeply about his connection to a book:

> Student: One time I wore five layers.
>
> Lois: How does that relate?
>
> Student: It's cold.
>
> Lois: Tie it to the book.

Changes in the students. The teachers reported that their students were becoming better at actively thinking and applying the strategies as they read. When Pressley asked Lori whether she thought her students were becoming more active she answered, "Yes. I think they are. They are getting more experiences with nonfiction texts. and I'm working with them in different ways." Lois told us midway through the year that, "They are having fun and getting it. The kids are

starting to get it." Our observations confirmed her comment. We saw students making and sharing their prior knowledge connections with one another in class.

The teachers especially saw growth from their struggling readers. Lois proudly related, "My lowest readers are improving. Nick's mom called. He's trying to read and understand better." (Nick was a reader who for the majority of the year remained silent, but made some small, but significant gains in constructing and sharing his understanding of books towards the end of the year.) Mark also saw the comprehension instruction benefiting his less motivated students, "My less self-regulated students who are impulsive…These strategies can focus the students and get them to focus in. They are engaged in the strategies."

We observed students beginning to flexibly use the strategies on their own. For example, in Mark's class, when we observed a lesson that focused on the questioning strategy, students were also weaving inferences, prior knowledge connections and predictions into their meaning making. Likewise, Lois naturally transitioned into explicitly teaching the questioning strategy after her students had already begun wondering aloud while reporting their connections. During one of the last lessons we observed, we saw Lois begin a lesson with a class discussion of the why good readers liked to talk about what they were thinking as they read. Some students said that it helped them know more about what they were reading. Other students said that it was more fun and easier to read with someone else and to have someone talk to about what they were reading. Thus, the students seemed to understand at least implicitly, that sometimes socially constructed meaning was richer and more engaging than reading alone.

Discussion

The teachers we studied in this investigation did not become nearly as proficient at comprehension strategies instruction as some teachers we have observed (Pressley et al., 1992;

Pressley, Gaskins, Solic, & Collins, 2005). As a result, their students did not become as proficient in using the comprehension strategies taught as some students we have observed (again, Pressley et al., 1992; Pressley, Gaskins, Solic, & Collins, 2005). We stress however, that in the past, when we have seen proficient comprehension strategies teaching and learning, both the teachers and students have been at it for at least several years. The data collected here add especially to the evidence that teachers do not easily become adept at providing comprehension strategies instruction during their first year (see also Klingner et al., 2004; Klingner et al., 1998; Mason, 2004; Pressley & El-Dinary, 1997).

We documented here the diverse challenges for teachers attempting to implement comprehension strategies instruction. First, there was no doubt that the teachers found this a new way to think about reading and teaching of reading. This is consistent with the conclusion that teachers do not always use comprehension strategies on their own (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). Their trepidations occurred in an environment in which other teachers expressed little interest in learning how to teach such strategies and often provided input suggesting that the pedagogy associated with comprehension strategies teaching does not always work in the classroom. So, in addition to lacking confidence in themselves, sometimes the teachers lacked confidence in the guidance they were receiving.

Even so, all five of the teachers who stuck with the professional development attempted to fit it into their classroom instruction, despite the fact that learning about comprehension strategies instruction required that they invest significant time, and teaching of the strategies took considerable classroom time. While the time demands certainly were important, there were other teaching challenges as well. For example, crafting lessons was made more difficult because there were not always readable books available, especially for the weakest readers.

Comprehension strategies instruction requires monitoring of students. Scaffolded teaching created some classroom management problems as well. The teachers especially had difficulties determining when and how much explicit teaching of strategies was required. They expressed disappointment that their students did not quickly develop into self-regulated users of the strategies. That they did not may have contributed to some of the teacher concerns about whether the comprehension strategies instruction really would impact standardized test performance, with these teachers quite concerned with reading assessment issues in general.

One important impediment to the development of the kind of reflective reading that is strategically mediated is that the students already have an approach to reading: Many of the students had internalized that reading should be done quickly, beginning with the first words in the text and reading linearly to the end of the text. The goal they had developed over their years in elementary schooling was to finish the text quickly, a goal incompatible with pausing to predict, ask questions, seek clarifications, and summarize text as it is being processed. What that means is that the fifth-grade teacher who is teaching comprehension strategies is not just attempting to develop self-regulated use of comprehension strategies in students but also must extinguish a form of self-regulated reading that has already developed that is incompatible with use of comprehension strategies.

Despite the challenges, however, there was real progress for the five teachers, with their attitudes towards strategies instruction positive, which probably motivated the many attempts to teach the strategies that we witnessed. There was no doubt that the students in these classrooms were more cognitively active in the ways stimulated by comprehension strategies instruction at the end compared to the beginning of the study.

The lessons learned here are important in the current curricular context. The National Reading Panel (2000) recognized that teaching of comprehension strategies can increase reading achievement, which provided stimulus for the requirement in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (107th Congress, 2002) that comprehension strategies be taught in schools receiving such funds. This research establishes that considerable professional development is going to be required if teachers are to teach comprehension strategies at all. This research and previous observations suggest that teachers will struggle during their first year of attempts to teach comprehension to students. There very much needs to be substantial research about how teachers develop their abilities to teach comprehension over a few years, as well as research on how students respond to such instruction when offered over years rather than during only one year.

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