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"TEACHING NARRATIVE STRUCTURE TO STUDENTS WITH LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS IMPROVE COMPREHENSION OF EXPOSITORY TEXTS"

Abstract. The author attempts to look through the structure of the narratives from the point of view of its use for better understanding of read material.

The purpose of the current study was to determine if an oral language intervention that highlighted knowledge of narrative text structure was associated with improved comprehension of expository passages that contained aspects of narrative text structure.

This study examined whether training in narrative text structure was associated with improved comprehension for expository passages that contained aspects of narrative structure. The findings indicate that literature-based narrative training has a positive impact on comprehension of expository text recall.

Keywords: narrative analysis, language impairments, expository texts

Introduction

Reading plays a vital role in learning foreign languages and reading can best be organized around the traditional division of discourse into a number of structural patterns. Practice in these structural patterns encourages students to organize knowledge and to see the ways in which information can be conveyed. Teaching narrative structure is intended for use by students to know classifying, comparing, defining, looking for organizational structures, seeking the answers and cause. Thus, involves to read attentively and critical activities.

Narratives or stories are integral parts of our social interactions and our ways of conceptualizing the world. By having at its core the telling of experience, narrative encompasses much of our daily discourse. Narratives are used to report on, evaluate, and regulate activities, as well as to provide an implicit common organization of experience and feeling of emotional involvement and solidarity. Narrative is compelling because it provides an account not only of what happens to people, the "landscape of action", but what those involved in the action (and those telling it) know, think, or feel—the "landscape of consciousness" [1, 99].

It is meaningful that community is established and students are socialized through the daily flow of narratives. Narratives maintain the social history and historical knowledge base of the community. Narrative discourse occurs in all societies, with variation that reflects the culture of its tellers, but also with certain universal characteristics. Topic-centered, chronological, and decontextualized recounts are most typical, but other narrative structures exist, such as the topic-associated, poetic, and contextualized style of some African Americans or the short, minimalist, and implicit style of some Japanese Americans (Minami).

The narrative is the earliest emerging monologue discourse form. It has aspects of both oral and literate styles of language so can be an effective context in which to learn language skills and acquire knowledge. Not only do we talk in stories, but we think in them. Bruner describes the episodic organization of mind as a narrative mode of thought, predominant in young children, but basic to all human experience. Narrative organization may arise out of children's earliest concepts: generalized scripts reflecting the daily life events through which world knowledge is experienced. Decontextualization and abstraction of events gradually occur, but the primacy of the activity schema as an organizing framework continues. This means that children (and adults) often learn a concept as part of a meaningful event, and may continue to remember the concept as part of a generalized version of that event.

The role of narrative text structures

The main aim of the narrative is to teach reading and comprehension the reading material, to analyse it and to be ready for transferring the message into one's own conscious and motivate him or her thinking and speaking.

The objective of the topic is to analyse the role and reasons of text structure for improving comprehension of expository texts.

The methods of investigating are bibliographical, analysis, comparative, observational.

As a rule, students first learn to read narrative text structures, which are story-like structures that facilitate their learning to read. Consequently, students enter school having a sense of narrative structures as they appear in texts. Across the years of studying, their awareness of text structures must increase as they progressively shift from reading a story line or casual text to reading for information. There is a noticeable shift to reading texts for information, information that is often dense and written in long passages.

As a matter of fact, reading teachers may find teaching text structure for expository texts an effective technique to improve reading achievement averages.

There have been several studies have addressed the question of how to improve the ability of students with learning disabilities to use narrative structure.

For example, Idol-Maestas (1985), developed a strategy that consisted of the following steps:

(T): study story titles

(E): examine and skim pages for clues

(L, L): look for important and difficult words

(S): think about the story settings

Using this strategy, called TELLS, students improved their performance on comprehension questions and raised their scores on a standardized reading test. However, when the intervention was removed, student performance declined [6].

Let us turn to the reasons of teaching expository text structures. Most expository texts are structured to facilitate the study process for prospective readers. These texts contain structural elements that help guide students through their reading. Authors of expository texts use these structures to arrange and connect ideas. Students who understand the idea of text structure and how to analyze it are likely to learn more than students who lack this understanding [2]. The research literature in this field reveals that students' reading comprehension skills improve when they acquire knowledge of texts' structural development and use them properly.

Instruction on text structure indeed has a positive effect on the students' recall protocols. Knowledge of the rhetorical relationship of the ideas-main idea, major ideas, and supporting details-helps readers with their comprehension of the expository texts. There is no doubt that knowledge of text organization or structure is an important factor for text comprehension.

Text features can help readers locate and organize information in the text. For example, headings help introduce students to specific bits of information. Presenting information in this manner helps students hold each bit of information in their short-term memory. Students then can process it or connect it to background knowledge and store it in their long-term memory. Without headings, information would be overwhelming, making it difficult to be processed effectively.

Solutions of the problem

Structural elements in expository texts vary; therefore, it is important to introduce students to the components of various texts throughout the study year. It is also important to teach and model the use of these components properly at the beginning of the year. The recognition and use of text organization are essential processes underlying comprehension and retention. Students are expected to recognize expository text structures at the end of pre-intermediate level. Meyer classified these text structures as follows [3]:

1. Description-The author describes a topic.
2. Sequence-The author uses numerical or chronological order to list items or events.
3. Compare/contrast-The author compares and contrasts two or more similar events, topics, or objects.
4. Cause/effect-The author delineates one or more causes and then describes the ensuing effects.
5. Problem/solution-The author poses a problem or question and then gives the answer.

The ability to identify and analyze these text structures in expositorytexts helps readers to comprehend the text more easily and retain it longer. To achieve better results, it is highly recommended to introduce and work on text structures in the order prescribed in what follows.

Tompkins (1998) suggested the following three steps to teach expository text structures [4]:

- Introduce an organizational pattern-The teacher introduces the signal words and phrases that identify each text structure and gives students a graphic organizer for each pattern.
- Give students opportunities to work on the text-The teacher provides the students with chances to analyze the text structures in informational books, not stories. At this stage, students learn the signal words and phrases in the text that identify each text pattern. They also may use graphic organizers to illustrate these patterns.
- Invite students to write paragraphs using each text structure pattern-The students' first writing activity should be a whole-class activity, followed by small-group, partner, and independent writing activities.

This involves selecting a topic and using a graphic organizer to plan the paragraphs. Finally, the students write a rough draft using signal words and phrases for the text structure, revise, and edit the paragraph to produce the final product. The teacher can then repeat these steps for each of the five text structures to ensure a comprehensive text structure coverage.

Having applied the procedure recommended by Tompkins [4], we would like to share our own experience in teaching expository text structure and shed more light on the practical aspects of teaching text structure in reading classes. The first and most important thing for you as a teacher is to be well informed about different text structures for expository texts, the signal words and phrases for each text structure, and the appropriate graphic organizer specific to each text structure.

Before you prepare any instructional plan to start training students and embark on reading activities, you must model all the procedures. Meanwhile, the students watch you focusing on the steps you have mentioned, from recognizing the signal words and phrases to applying the graphic organizers to each text. After you have practiced for the first few sessions and students have collected enough background on what they are going to do, it is time to use the following recommended procedure:

10 Introduce the text structures in order, starting with description and finishing with compare/ contrast. This order is followed in most textbook readings.

11 Introduce and work on a single text structure in each lesson. Do not combine them. Work on one text structure for three or four sessions, then proceed to the next one.

12 Prepare short passages (about six to eight lines) for the text structure you are going to work on in that session. As the texts are short, you can work on at least four texts according to the time allocated for each session.

13 Try to highlight and emphasize the signal words and phrases in each text and elaborate on a series of signal words for each text structure. Tell students that authors of informational texts use specific signal words and phrases for each rhetorical structure.

After students are familiar with signal words and phrases, ask them to find these clues in structure of each text through signal words and phrases. Then, invite them to write some short paragraphs and use some of the signal words and phrases appropriate to each text structure.

Working with graphic organizers is the next step after teaching signal words and phrases. For the first few sessions of working with graphic organizers, prepare for your students a completed graphic organizer before they start working on the text. This will help them create a better image of the hierarchy of ideas and their interrelationships discussed in the passage. Graphic organizers help students' list major ideas under the main idea of the text and put the supporting details under the related major idea. Having a graphic representation of the text's ideas helps readers comprehend and retain the content.

Once students are comfortable with different kinds of graphic organizers, you can give them an incomplete graphic organizer after they have finished reading the passage. Let them complete it on their own.

At this stage, the students would be able to work on a blank graphic organizer independently, elicit the ideas from the text, and demonstrate the hierarchy of the ideas in a graphic organizer. These activities may vary from partially blank graphic organizers to totally blank schematic representations.

Research has shown that knowledge of text structures enhances students' abilities to identify important ideas, construct meaning, acquire new content knowledge, predict future events, summarize, and monitor comprehension when reading or writing narrative and informational texts. An emerging body of evidence suggests that training in oral language skills can result in significant and lasting improvements in later reading comprehension.

A randomized clinical trial was conducted and three approaches were compared to improving comprehension for participants with specific reading-comprehension deficits. Eighty-four students, who demonstrated specific reading comprehension deficits (i.e., an average discrepancy of 16 standard points between reading comprehension and reading fluency), were randomly assigned to one of three interventions targeting reading comprehension including text comprehension training, oral language training and a combination of both trainings. The text comprehension program focused on working with written texts and developing skills such as application of metacognitive strategies (i.e., visualizing, rereading, thinking aloud etc.), inferential reasoning from written texts and producing written narratives. The oral language program concentrated on spoken language and included learning specific vocabulary, figurative language and production of spoken narratives. The combined program incorporated all components from both the text and oral programs equally. Results indicated that all students made significant gains in reading comprehension. However, the students who received the oral language intervention demonstrated increased reading-comprehension skills up to 11-months after the intervention; whereas, those who were part of the text comprehension and combined programs did not show as much generalization of skills or increases in their ability to comprehend reading passages. This provides evidence that oral-language therapy may have far- reaching effects as it pertains to knowledge of text structures and reading-comprehension.

The purpose of the current study was to determine if an intervention designed to improve oral language and knowledge of narrative text structure improved comprehension of expository passages that were descriptive in nature and contained aspects of narrative structure. It was hypothesized that knowledge of narrative structure would serve to improve comprehension of informational passages that contained similar structures (eg., character, setting, actions, feelings, plans).

In order to reason that increased knowledge of narrative structure was associated with comprehension of expository information, students first had to demonstrate significant gains in narrative language and structure when compared to students who did not receive the instruction.

In the current study, students in the experimental group demonstrated significantly better comprehension performance as measured by their ability to answer questions about the descriptive material. This finding is particularly compelling given the fact that the content in the informational passages may have been unfamiliar to elementary students. Further, all of the

students had been identified as having language impairment, so it is a compelling finding that they were able to improve their performance in answering comprehension questions about the descriptive passages.

Findings

Participants, despite age differences, made statistically and clinically significant changes in their comprehension of expository text and knowledge of narrative text structure. These findings have educational implications. Students with language impairments have increased difficulty identifying important ideas, constructing meaning, acquiring new content knowledge, predicting future events, summarizing, and monitoring comprehension when reading or writing narrative and informational texts. The narrative intervention utilized in this study did show the transfer of comprehension from narrative to expository text structure. This indicates that training in one structure can provide improvement in another. This is important because an intervention that can transfer to multiple situations is preferred. It will be more feasible and efficient to find an intervention that will aid students with language impairments in all aspects of text structure to ensure success in the classroom. To find a more productive way to improve recall of text as well as comprehension, further study of narrative-based intervention is warranted.

Conclusion

Reading expository texts is critical for growth in reading ability and most urgent to rank normal achievers; the ability to read, comprehend, and analyze expository texts (i.e., identifying main idea, major ideas, and supporting details) could be good criteria to rank students' academic reading achievement. One way to measure and rank students' reading achievement of the expository texts is to teach reading through text structures. This will raise text structure awareness and is assumed to lead to a permanent improvement in reading skill.

One of the principles of the reading expository texts is that students should deal with as much authentic contents as their language level allows.

Students will improve different skills through the authentic texts which cover a wide range of interesting topics and stories, to develop student’s comprehensions in different areas, to teach communicate freely and express their opinion and thoughts. Through reading the students learn creative tools using in writing and students become an active participant in this process of communication.

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