

***THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHILD'S
CONCEPT OF READING
AND READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE***

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Faculty of Education
State University College at Brockport

in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

Lynda S. Faulks
State University College at Brockport
Brockport, New York

April 1993

SUBMITTED BY:

Lynda Faulkner
Candidate

April 1993
Date

APPROVED BY:

James L. Begg
Thesis Advisor

4/21/93
Date

Arthur E. Smith
Second Faculty Reader

4/22/93
Date

Robert E. Baker
Director of Graduate Studies

4/23/93
Date

Table of Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
Purpose.....	1
Need for the Study.....	1
Definition of Terms.....	4
Limitations of the Study.....	4
Summary.....	5
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	6
Purpose.....	6
Children's Concepts of Reading.....	6
Young Children's Concepts of Reading and Reading Performance.....	11
Older Children's Concepts of Reading and Reading Performance.....	14
Summary of the Chapter.....	16
III. DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....	17
Purpose.....	17
Null Hypothesis.....	17
Subjects and Materials.....	18
Procedure.....	18
Interview Reliability.....	21
Reading Comprehension Performance.....	21
Statistical Analysis.....	21
Summary.....	21
IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	23
Purpose.....	23
Findings.....	23
Analysis and Interpretation.....	30
Summary.....	35

V. Conclusions and Implications.....	36
Purpose.....	36
Implications for Classroom Practice.....	36
Reading for Meaning.....	36
Developing a Concept of Reading.....	37
Implications for Research.....	40
Summary.....	41
References.....	42
Appendix.....	45
Cramer's V.....	45

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Data Table: Response and Comprehension Level.....	32
2. Chi-Square Table: Response and Comprehension Level.....	32
3. Data Table: Response and Type of School.....	34
4. Chi-Square Table: Response and Type of School.....	34

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between the child's concept of reading and reading comprehension performance. The subjects were forty fourth grade students from four different types of schools (parochial, private, public urban, and public suburban) in western New York. The child's concept of reading was studied during an interview procedure. The child's reading comprehension performance was measured by his/her raw score on the New York State Reading Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Test.

After testing the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance, it was found that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the child's concept of reading and his/her reading comprehension performance as measured by the New York State PEP Reading Test. There was, however, a statistically significant relationship found between the child's concept of reading and the type of school he/she attended at the .05 level of significance. Further research was recommended.

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. The researcher sought answers to these questions:

1. What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

Need for the Study

Recent research has found that children have misconceptions about the nature and process of reading. In a study involving first and third graders, Burns-Paterson (1991) found that a large percentage of the students in the study had a very vague understanding of the process of reading, especially in a basal reading setting. She attributed it to

immaturity and inability to articulate their answers or to the stress on skills that obscures purposes for reading in basal programs. All of the students were able to see the how and why of reading, but few understood what reading really is: a form of communication between readers and writers.

Another study involving first graders was conducted by Bondy (1990). Bondy's study also did not assess students' reading progress or achievement over time, however, classroom observations aroused concern about the impact of students' definitions of reading. For example, low-group readers who believed that reading was "saying the words" did not choose to spend free time reading (or pretend reading) books. According to Bondy, it appeared that, because they believed reading meant saying words aloud with an audience present, they tended to avoid books, except when they saw an opportunity to achieve social status. The result was avoidance of the very experience that could have helped them the most.

The importance of one's perception of the reading process continues to be evident even beyond childhood. Ortiz (1991), a college professor, created an exercise to help her students become aware of their reading behaviors. She wanted them to learn to slow down and to perceive that alert and controlled reading behavior, as opposed to haphazard behavior, requires taking the time to figure out what each reading situation demands.

After arriving in class, she circulated a sheet of paper on the top of which she had written "PLEASE SIGN THIS SHEET. Even though Monday, September 16 is a school holiday, I agree to come to class." As the page arrived on each desk, students dutifully signed it. There were at least 10 signatures before one person raised her hand to say that she already had plans for Monday and could not come to class. After hearing this, students who had signed the paper began reminding the professor that there were no classes scheduled for Monday. They quickly realized that they had agreed to something to which they had no intention of fulfilling. Ortiz provided other similar activities throughout the semester. Students became aware of the importance of reading for meaning.

According to McLain (1991), reading for meaning or comprehending, is the major goal of the reader and involves the interaction of the reader, the text, and the contextual situation. She feels that skilled readers are aware of comprehension during their reading and use fix-up strategies when necessary. "As readers increase their awareness of processes involved in understanding text, and use strategies when comprehension failure occurs, then independent, skilled readers will evolve. Reading performance is increased as comprehension becomes an active part of the reading process" (p. 171).

If research can show that students who understand the role that meaning plays in reading will perform better on comprehension tasks, then obviously teachers need to do something about it. An attempt

should be made to provide an understanding of the reading process and place additional emphasis on the role that meaning plays in reading. Reading is an essential process to learning. It may be that good readers are those who know what reading is all about. This study examined students' concepts of reading and the correlation between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance.

Definition of Terms

Concept of reading- a general knowledge of reading, namely an understanding of the relationship between the reader and the text (Meloth, 1989).

Limitations of the Study

This study consisted of 40 randomly selected students from the fourth grade. The only criteria was that the selection process included 12 students whose New York State Reading PEP test raw scores ranged from 0 to 35, 16 students whose New York State Reading PEP Test raw scores ranged from 36 to 49, and 12 students whose New York State Reading PEP Test raw scores were 50 and above. The schools selected were an urban, a suburban, private, and parochial school in Western New York State.

Summary

Research indicates that children do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of reading. The importance of reading for meaning or comprehending was mentioned. Further research needed to be investigated to understand children's concepts of reading and their concepts of reading in relationship to their reading comprehension performance.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. The researcher sought answers to these questions:

1. What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

Children's Concepts of Reading

Research has found that young children enter reading instruction with little understanding of the purpose and nature of reading. What is reading? Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1991) lists over thirty definitions for the word read. Children, as well, are able to define "read" in a number of ways. They may perceive reading to be school

related, a decoding or mechanical process, object related, an activity, or a meaning getting method.

This has been an issue for some time now. Even in studies as far back as the 1960's, it was found that young children were unclear about the meaning of reading. Reid (1966) concluded that of the group of preschool children he studied, almost all were aware that they could not read. He also found that they had very little precise notion of what a reading activity was. They were not clear whether to "read" the pictures or the other "marks" on the paper.

In contrast to Reid's findings, Mason (1967) found that ninety percent of the 178 preschoolers he asked, "Do you like to read? Can you do it all by yourself?", believed that they could already read without even knowing what reading was. Mason stated that, "One of the first steps in learning to read is learning that one doesn't already know how" (p. 132).

Lee (1969) found that children's responses to the question, "What is reading?" fell into two general categories. Answers which emphasized translating symbols to sound or saying words were labeled superficial and mechanical. Answers which expressed a reaction to ideas, an evaluation of the author's thoughts or the development of understanding were labeled personal and significant. Lee concluded that too many children had been led to believe that reading is a mechanical activity highly related to phonics.

An investigation of 108 first graders' perceptions of the reading process led Weintraub and Denny (1965) to state that, "Twenty-seven percent of the children came to first grade unable to state a valid definition of reading" (p. 327). When asked, "What is reading?", 33 percent gave object-related responses, such as to read a paper, or reading is when you read a book. Twenty percent described reading in mechanical terms or as something one is expected to do. Another 20 percent described reading as a cognitive task such as, it helps to learn things and learn to read. Weintraub and Denny concluded that there is a need for teachers to strengthen the emphasis on helping children understand that reading is a thinking and meaning making act.

Two different studies in the year 1976 found, once again, that children were unclear about the meaning of reading. Interviews by Tovey (1976) found that the majority of children in the study viewed reading as a mechanical activity in which they should look at every word and pay careful attention to the letters in the words. They thought of reading as an oral activity in which they pronounce words by looking at letters.

Johns and Ellis (1976) asked three questions of students in grades 1-8. Their goal was to examine the students' concept of reading. The questions were: "What is reading?", "What do you do when you read?", and "If someone didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her that he/she would have to learn?" They reported that 69% of the students gave essentially meaningless responses to the question,

"What is reading?". Only 5% of the students viewed reading as a process involving both word recognition and meaning. This percentage was largely attributable to students in the seventh and eighth grades. Of the 85 responses, only 22 came from students in grades one through six.

In more recent studies, it was found that children formed concepts of reading as they interpreted classroom experiences. Their findings suggest that the manner in which children are taught to read and write is related to the conceptions the children hold and take into subsequent literary experiences.

Rasinski and DeFord's (1988) study, involving first graders, found that if children are taught to read or write in a way that emphasizes correct decoding or encoding of small units of language, they tend to view reading and writing as a process of saying the words in texts correctly or spelling the words correctly with little regard for meaning. Conversely, if children are taught to read and write in a way that emphasizes the apprehension and use of meaning, they tend to see reading and writing as purposeful and meaningful activities.

In a study conducted by Freppon (1991), children were given the option of defining reading as thinking about a story in their mind or saying all the words correctly. Of the children in a literature-based group, 83% chose "thinking about the story" or "both thinking about the story and saying words", while only thirty-four percent of the skill-based students selected these answers.

Based on this research, it is disturbing to note that many children have little or no understanding of what reading is all about. Research is available, however, to indicate that over time, children's concepts of reading become more refined. Young children between the ages of four and six see reading as physical behaviors such as turning the pages, looking at the book, or using their eyes. Children at the ages of ten and twelve realize reading is more than looking at words. They understand that people read for many reasons, and they recognize the need for the reader to incorporate his own intentions and purposes while reading. Children between sixteen and eighteen years of age determine for themselves what meaning they will obtain through their own experiences and understanding. (Huffman, Edwards & Green, 1982)

Shapiro and White (1991) found that children in grades one to five were more inclined to give a response indicating that reading was either a word calling, decoding, or meaning generating process but not a combination of these activities. On the other hand, children in grades six and seven tended to respond with a statement indicating that word calling or decoding and meaning were involved in reading.

In a study conducted by Myers and Paris (1978), young children were found to be relatively insensitive to semantic dimensions of paragraphs or to goals and methods of meaning apprehension. Second graders perceived reading as an orthographic-verbal translation problem rather than as a meaning construction and comprehension task. In general, they focused on decoding goals rather than semantically related goals

for reading and indicated few strategies appropriate for information extraction. It was found that by sixth grade, students were more aware of meaning dimensions of paragraphs and of the skills required to achieve understanding. Students were also aware of the existence of various reading strategies and were sensitive to when and how to use them. Eighty percent of the sixth graders studied reported that they would reread paragraphs. Seventy-five percent of these sixth graders who responded that they would reread reported the justification that rereading the paragraph would provide information and contextual cues useful for determining meaning.

Research indicates that children have different viewpoints of the reading process (Freppon, 1991; Johns and Ellis, 1976; Lee, 1969; Mason, 1967; Rasinski and DeFord, 1988; Reid, 1966; Tovey, 1976; Weintraub and Denny, 1965). Although older students have a somewhat better understanding of the process than younger children (Huffman, Edwards and Green, 1982; Myers and Paris, 1978; Shapiro and White, 1991), it is unsettling to note that many children have little or no understanding of what reading is all about.

Young Children's Concepts of Reading and Reading Performance

A positive correlation between children's concepts of reading and reading readiness was found in many studies. A study by Downing, Ollila, and Oliver (1977) examined young children in high, middle, and

low socio-economic schools. They found that their conceptual development, as measured by the Orientation to Literacy, Understanding Literacy Behavior, and Technical Language of Literacy Tests, was positively correlated with performance on the more conventional perceptual measures of reading readiness.

Ayers and Downing (1982) also concluded that children's concepts of literacy are directly related to reading readiness. They state that children's recognition of reading and writing activities, their comprehension of the technical linguistic terminology used by teachers in reading instruction, as well as their concepts about the purpose of literacy are important to their readiness to profit from instruction.

Eighty-one children from three to seven years of age were examined by Lomax and McGee (1987). They found that not only much-researched abilities such as attending to sound segments in words and knowing letter-sound correspondences, but also other, less-researched abilities, such as concepts about print, are linked to word-reading acquisition.

A more recent study conducted by Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) involved low socio-economic urban children from kindergarten and first grade. Results of the Written Language Knowledge pretests clearly indicated that, overall, the children who were the most successful at reading and writing at the end of first grade began kindergarten with more highly and broadly developed schemata about written language as compared to the children who were the least

successful. The less successful children indicated that the marks on the paper were just that and no more.

Speculation is that reading achievement can be influenced by one's concepts and expectations of the task. For example, Fryer (1976) hypothesized that concepts about reading were of greater value in determining the child's present reading ability than age, reading tests, or inventories which had been used by teachers. There is limited research on the correlation between a child's concept of reading and his/her reading performance, but the research that is available supports Fryer's hypothesis.

Print-related concepts were found to be related to reading success. In a 1957 study, Vernon concluded that the fundamental and basic characteristics of reading disability appears to be cognitive confusion and lack of system. She found that the most frequent symptom of reading disability was that the child did not seem to understand "why." Why did certain successions of printed letters correspond to certain phonetic sounds in words?

Johns (1980) found that factors other than age may influence or affect the acquisition of print-related concepts. In his study involving first graders, it was found that above-average readers' concepts about print were significantly higher than those for average and below-average readers. Johns also noted that perhaps Ehri (1979) was correct in stating that awareness of concepts about print may interact with the

reading acquisition process so that it exists as both a consequence of what has occurred and as a cause of further progress in reading.

A study relating concepts of reading to reading achievement was conducted by Schenckner (1976). He tested 30 first and 30 third grade students using the Peabody Vocabulary Test, Form B (1959), and Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, levels A and C, Form A (1965), the Specific Cognitive Factors Subtest of the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test, Form C (1970), and subjects' responses to questions about their concept of reading. He reported finding a significant positive correlation for first grade subjects between concepts of reading and reading achievement. Third grade students were judged to have significantly higher (more mature) concepts of reading than the first graders.

These findings offer additional support to the speculation that young children's concepts of the reading process are related to reading performance. How about the performance of older children? Even less research has been conducted with children of this age level.

Older Children's Concepts of Reading and Reading Performance

The research that is available on older children's concepts of reading and reading performance also supports the speculation that there is a relationship between students' reading concepts and reading performance. According to Wittrock (1986), the research indicates that

well-developed concepts of reading are essential for successful academic performance.

Johns (1972) reported finding a significant, positive correlation ($r = .33$) between the judged maturity of students' concepts of reading and reading achievement as measured by grade equivalent scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Survey D (1965). Fourth and fifth graders were asked to define reading and their responses were evaluated. Good readers, students a year or more above grade level, produced a significantly greater number of meaningful definitions of reading than poor readers, students a year or more below grade level.

In a study by Canney and Winograd (1979), it was stated that there appears to be a relationship between a student's awareness that reading entails some meaning-focused activities and his/her comprehension performance. (p. 13).

Certainly, the reader's perception of the tasks of reading, his/her schema for reading, guides his/her behavior and influence how a reader uses current knowledge, decoding proficiency, and study strategies. Students will learn to decode text fluently and comprehend text more effectively when they know that reading is a process requiring attention to graphic stimuli and to ideas (p. 13).

Summary of the Chapter

Research indicates that children have little understanding of what reading is all about. It also indicates that reading performance can be affected by one's concept of reading. This is evident in both younger and older students. There is, however, limited research available for students in grades above the primary level. There is even less research available on the correlation between a student's concept of reading and reading comprehension performance.

This study investigated the concepts of reading of fourth grade students. It also examined the correlation between the students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance.

Chapter III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. The researcher sought answers to these questions:

1. What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

Null Hypothesis

This study investigated the following null hypothesis for fourth grade students:

There is no statistically significant relationship between children's concepts of reading and reading comprehension performance as

measured by the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test. It was tested at the 95% confidence level.

Subjects

This study involved 40 randomly selected fourth grade students from four different elementary schools in western New York. The schools participating included a private suburban, a parochial urban-suburban, an urban, and a public suburban school. The schools were either literature based, skills based, or used a literary program with an emphasis on skills.

Materials

The materials in this study included the following:

1. tape recorder
2. New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test Results (May 1992)

Procedure

The researcher, in a stratified manner, randomly selected 10 fourth grade students from each of the four participating schools. The sample of students ranged in ability from low to above average. Low comprehenders were considered as those whose raw score on the New

York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test was between 0 and 35, average comprehenders as those whose raw score was between 36 and 49, and high comprehenders as those whose raw score was 50 and above.

The four schools included a private suburban, parochial urban-suburban, urban, and public suburban school with different approaches to teaching reading. The purpose for this was to work with a varied testing population.

Each participant was interviewed individually and recorded on audio tape. The interviewer began by trying to establish rapport with the student by providing personal information about such items as her birthday, family structure, and interests. The student was asked the following questions:

1. *What is your full name?*
2. *How old are you?*
3. *How old do you think I am?*

(The interviewer shared her age with the student.)

4. *How many children are in your family?*

(The interviewer shared that she has three brothers and no sisters.)

5. *When is your birthday?*

(The interviewer shared that her birthday is on November 17)

6. *When you get home from school, what do you enjoy doing most?*

(The interviewer responded to the student's answer.)

7. *Can you describe how you do this?*

(The purpose of this question was to provide the student with the opportunity to describe the process he/she uses when performing a task)

8. *What do you do when you read?*

(The purpose of this question was to encourage the student to begin thinking about the reading process.)

9. *If you knew someone who didn't know how to read, what would you tell him/her?*

(Again, the purpose of this question was to provide the student with the opportunity to begin thinking about the reading process.)

10. *What is reading?*

(The main target of study in this research.)

"What is reading?" was positioned last to allow students to warm up to the subject of reading and minimize the possibility of an "I don't know" response. Student interviews were analyzed and responses to "What is reading?" were placed into one of two categories: a meaning related response or a non-meaning related response.

Responses that involved using reading to get meaning or to learn something were labeled as meaning-related responses. Responses that reading was making use of phonics and/or mechanics or that it was something you do with a book (activity or object related) were considered non-meaning related.

Interview Reliability

In order to provide for reliability in the selection process, inter-rater reliability was used. The researcher, as well as an experienced teacher with a master's degree in education, categorized the responses. They individually listened to each of the forty subjects' responses to the question "What is reading?". The result was 98% agreement between the researcher and the other rater.

Reading Comprehension Performance

The student's reading comprehension performance was the raw score value that he/she achieved on the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test in May 1992.

Statistical Analysis

To measure the relationship between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance, as measured by the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test raw scores from 1992, a chi-square analysis was used.

Summary

Forty fourth grade students from four different schools were interviewed to determine their understanding of what reading is all

about. Comprehension scores from the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test were used to measure the relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. Data were analyzed for significance using a chi-square distribution.

Chapter IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. The researcher sought answers to these questions:

1. What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

Findings

The following were the results of each subject's response to the question "What is reading", as well as the type of school he/she were from and his/her raw score on the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading Test.

Categories: L = low comprehender

M = medium comprehender

H = high comprehender

<u>Subj.</u>	<u>Type of School</u>	<u>Raw Score</u>	<u>Response to "What is Reading?"</u>
1	urban	23 (L)	"Reading means a creative story. Some are real."
2	urban	26 (L)	"Reading is a different kind of experience. I use my imagination to put more details into it."
3	urban	20 (L)	"Reading is something to help you learn more."
4	urban	47 (M)	"It is very important to me, because if I didn't know how to read and an important letter came to me, I wouldn't know what it meant."
5	urban	46 (M)	"Having fun while you read. It is doing something instead of watching t.v."
6	urban	45 (M)	"It means taking pride in your reading. It's something you take part in so you have something to do."

- 7 urban 36 (M) "Reading is my life. It something that I can't stop doing. It is knowledge. Knowledge is power. It is like when you fill out an application, you have to read to know what you are doing."
- 8 urban 39 (M) "Reading is fun and you can explore."
- 9 urban 32 (L) "There are words that you put into paragraphs and it makes a story."
- 10 urban 35 (L) "Reading is reading about a story or about someone else's life. It's knowing all about it or understanding it."
- 11 public/suburban 53 (H) "It means you are giving your brain a rest from math and spelling and you can just relax and read."
- 12 public/suburban 54 (H) "Reading is looking at suburban the letters and understanding words that are put together."

- 13 public/suburban 54 (H) "Reading is lots of suburban books that has words in it and you read them."
- 14 public/suburban 49 (M) "It's like you're reading stories to learn or understand something someone has written."
- 15 public/suburban 45 (M) "It's when you try to understand words and when you are good at it you can look at books and papers and understand what it says."
- 16 public/suburban 49 (M) "It is a good way to learn about things. It is fun to do."
- 17 public/suburban 37 (M) "It is a book with words in it and you try to read it and there is vowels in the middle of the letters."
- 18 public/suburban 11 (L) "Reading means something that you see. You need to go to a library and get a book and then return it."

- 19 public/suburban 21 (L) "It's something you can write and something you can read in a book."
- 20 public/suburban 27 (L) "You take a book and you sit down in a bed or chair and read the book."
- 21 parochial 37 (M) "You sit down and see all these different words in front of you and you have to know how to say them. Some are about stories and fiction and real stories and stuff."
- 22 parochial 48 (M) "Reading is when you read words out of a book and it tells a story."
- 23 parochial 43 (M) "It is when you can read books and anything that has words on paper or anything. You can get into school and get jobs."
- 24 parochial 39 (M) "Words are written on a paper and then you read it."
- 25 parochial 29 (L) "Reading is when somebody reads them a book or reads them something."

- 26 parochial 52 (H) "Reading is when you use your brain to figure out writing. It tells you stories: fairy tales or whatever the writing is about."
- 27 parochial 51 (H) "Reading is when you pick a book and you have to know how to read. You read the words and just say the story."
- 28 parochial 22 (L) "When you read. It is fun."
- 29 parochial 25 (L) "Reading is fun. It is hard to read."
- 30 parochial 24 (L) "Reading different kinds of words."
- 31 private 52 (H) "Reading is when an author writes a book for different reasons: for people to enjoy, for people that they know, and for other reasons. It's a type of language. It's a way of communicating."
- 32 private 43 (M) "Reading is ...I can't describe it. Reading is... you have a book."

- 33 private 53 (H) "Reading is when you learn new words and adventures. It gives you good ideas. It's a hobby."
- 34 private 45 (M) "Reading is pages in a book that come out of letters. People use their eyes to help you understand it."
- 35 private 56 (H) "You use your eyes to help you learn things from a book and words."
- 36 private 49 (M) "It's just a skill that you learn , I guess. it's an important one."
- 37 private 56 (H) "It's a fun activity and I like it better than t.v., because when you watch t.v. it doesn't make you think. A picture in your head is nicer than a picture on a screen. Plus a t.v. can't describe something."
- 38 private 51 (H) "Reading is a whole new adventure, full of fun, adventure and other things."

- 39 private 56 (H) "Reading is when you read some letters on a page, but they have to make sense. They can be about different things."
- 40 private 55 (H) "Reading is when you string words together to mean something. You couldn't just choose them randomly."

Analysis and Interpretation

Answer to question #1:

What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?

According to the above data, fourth grade students have a varied concept of reading. They defined reading as a mechanical process involving phonics, a book or object related activity, an enjoyable or difficult experience, an important skill, or a way of communicating, learning, or understanding.

It is interesting to note that of the 40 fourth grade students involved in this study, only 18 (45%) defined reading as a meaning making process (a way of understanding, learning, or communicating).

Answer to question #2:

Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

This researcher compared fourth grade students' concepts about reading and their reading comprehension performance according to the New York State PEP Reading Test (1992). The results are summarized in tables 1 and 2.

Data Table: Response & Comprehension Level

TABLE 1

Response \ Comprehension Level	C1 Low (0-35)	C2 Medium (36-49)	C3 High (50-56)	Row Totals
	Meaning	3 5,4	7 7,2	8 5,4
Non-Meaning	9 6,6	9 8,8	4 6,6	22
Column Totals	12	16	12	40

Chi-Square Table: Response & Comprehension Level

TABLE 2

Cell	Fo	Fe	(Fo-Fe)	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² ÷ Fe
R1C1	3	5,4	-2,4	5,76	1,067
C2	7	7,2	-0,2	0,04	0,006
C3	8	5,4	2,6	6,76	1,252
R2C1	9	6,6	2,4	5,76	0,873
C2	9	8,8	0,2	0,04	0,005
C3	4	6,6	-2,6	6,76	1,024
Totals	40	40	0		

$$\chi^2 (\text{obtained}) = 4,227$$

$$\text{Degrees of Freedom} = 2, \chi^2 (\text{critical}) = 5,99$$

Since the critical value for chi-square for 2 degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is 5.99, and since the chi-square obtained is 4.227, the data failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, analysis of the data revealed that there is no significant relationship between understanding of the meaning of reading and reading comprehension performance.

It is, however, interesting to note that of the 40 fourth grade students involved in the study, only one out of the ten (10%) parochial students identified reading as a meaning making process. While six of the ten (60%) fourth grade students from an urban school, four of the ten (40%) fourth grade students from a public suburban school, and seven of the ten (70%) fourth grade students from a private school were able to define reading as a meaning making process.

Was there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and the type of school they attended? In a post hoc analysis, this researcher again used a chi-square analysis to measure the relationship between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and the type of school they attended. The null hypothesis investigated stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between children's concepts of reading and the type of school attended. It was tested at the 95% confidence level. The results are summarized in tables 3 and 4.

Data Table: Response & Type of School

TABLE 3

Response \ School	C1	C2	Row Total
R1 Parochial	1 4,5	9 5,5	10
R2 Public Urban	6 4,5	4 5,5	10
R3 Public Suburban	4 4,5	6 5,5	10
R4 Private	7 4,5	3 5,5	10
Column Totals	18	22	40

Chi-Square Table: Response & Type of School

TABLE 4

Cell	Fo	Fe	(Fo-Fe)	(Fo-Fe) ²	(Fo-Fe) ² ÷ Fe
R1C1	1	4,5	-3,5	12,25	2,722
C2	9	5,5	3,5	12,25	2,227
R2C1	6	4,5	1,5	2,25	0,5
C2	4	5,5	-1,5	2,25	0,409
R3C1	4	4,5	-0,5	0,25	0,056
C2	6	5,5	0,5	0,25	0,045
R4C1	7	4,5	2,5	6,25	1,389
C2	3	5,5	-2,5	6,25	1,136
Totals	40	40	0		

$$\chi^2(\text{obtained}) = 8,484$$

$$\text{Degree of Freedom} = 3 \quad \chi^2(\text{critical}) = 7,81$$

The critical value for chi-square for 3 degrees of freedom at the 95% confidence level is 7.81. Since the chi-square obtained is 8.484, the null hypothesis must be rejected. Therefore, a statistically significant relationship was found between students' concepts of reading and the type of school they attended.

Evaluating the strength of the relationship across the entire table, there is an unusually strong relationship between the meaning and non-meaning related responses and the type of school attended (Cramer's $V = 0.46$). Consequently, 46% of the variation in one variable is explained by the variation in the other variable. Cramer's V can be found in the appendix.

Summary

This study found that fourth grade students have varied concepts of reading. The data of this study failed to reject the null hypothesis. There was no significant relationship between reading comprehension performance as measured by the New York State Pupil Evaluation Program Reading Test (1992) and understanding of the meaning of reading for fourth grade students. There was, however, a significant relationship between the type of school attended and understanding of the meaning of reading for the fourth grade students involved in this study.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant correlation between fourth grade students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance. The researcher sought answers to these questions:

1. What concepts of reading do fourth grade students have?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance?

Implications for Classroom Practice

Reading for Meaning

Reading theorists, researchers, and educators agree on the importance of viewing reading as a meaning-making process. In order to comprehend what is read and to learn from reading, students must actively seek to process print in ways which produce comprehension and help construct knowledge.

Teachers are in a strategic position to help students learn how to approach a reading assignment. The findings in the study by Freppon (1991) suggested that both instruction and the developmental stage of learning to read influence beginning readers' concepts. Furthermore, Freppon states that although readers' knowledge of speech/print and letter/sound relationships are a pivotal factor in

learning to read, primary-grade instruction must also ensure children's acquisition of knowledge about the meaning-making aspect of reading.

Teachers can guide students to analyze the reading task, to make efficient plans for purposeful meaning, and to use appropriate strategies to enhance their ability to comprehend and reason from the text (Tregaskes and Daines, 1989). It was found in their study that the use of metacognitive strategies can significantly enhance important components of reading comprehension for students in the upper elementary grades. Visual imagery, summary sentences, and webbing were recommended strategies.

Huffman, Edwards and Green (1982) agree that teachers should use reading-for-meaning strategies. They recommend that teachers working with young children begin by asking questions such as "Does that sound right?" or "Does that make sense?". To encourage the use of semantic and syntactic cues, such questions as "Based on all the things which have happened so far, what do you think is going to happen next?" could be utilized.

In 1984, Hoffman recommended and worked with an experienced elementary school teacher in order to restructure her reading program. Typically, the students' first encounter with a story now occurs when the teacher reads the story to them and they answer comprehension questions. Only after discussing the story's meaning do the students read it, either silently or aloud. This approach emphasizes reading for meaning. Moreover, when students do read aloud, they are able to read with greater accuracy and fluency.

Developing a Concept of Reading

Although this study did not find a significant statistical relationship between students' concepts of reading and their reading comprehension performance, it was found that the development of a concept of reading was still worthwhile,

considering that only 45% of the 40 fourth grade students were able to define reading as a meaning making process. Other researchers have examined ways of doing just this.

Templeton and Thomas (1984) concluded that from the beginning in school, children should experience print in a variety of contexts and in a variety of forms in order for accurate concepts about written words to emerge. They recommend that children have plenty of opportunity to write and to invent spellings. It is noted that teachers should not assume that primary pupils have clearly sorted out all structural and significant aspects of words.

Johns (1976) also makes a statement about what teachers should not assume. He points out that because teachers are teaching children to read, it doesn't always mean that they are also providing a basis for understanding the reading process. Teachers should make the effort to help children understand what reading is all about. He recommends the following technique to help build a concept of reading. He, however, does add that this suggestion represents a meager, but fruitful beginning. It is doubtful that all students will grasp a worthwhile concept of reading from this one presentation.

Write "kingcup" on the board. Ask a student to say the word. Ask other children whether or not they agree. Continue the process until the class agrees that the word is "kingcup." Then ask some children if they can "read" the word. Most children will probably say that they can read the word because they view reading as merely decoding or word recognition. When this point is reached, ask the class, "How do you know you can read the word?" Many children will respond by saying, "I can read the word because I can pronounce it." Sooner or later a student is likely to ask what the word means. At this point, lead students to the conclusion that reading involves understanding. Make a distinction between being able to say the word and knowing what the word means.

Another helpful suggestion was made by Bondy (1990). She claimed that by studying accounts of how reading works, students can refine their understanding of the reading process. This can be accomplished by providing students with brief pieces of different kinds of text and having them read and answer questions about their reading. The texts should vary in content. Students answer questions after each passage, such as (a) What were you thinking as you began this passage? (b) What were you thinking as you read the word _____? (c) How would you describe the way you read this passage? (d) How did your reading of this passage compare to your reading of the (first, second, etc.) passage? Some students may have difficulty answering these questions at first, but they become more sensitive to their own reading behavior when they hear peers describe their cognitive activity. Bondy states that when students have gained a grasp of the reading process and the process of becoming a reader, they can begin to think intelligently about teaching practices.

Golden (1984) offers several suggestions on how teachers can help students extend and refine their concepts of literature. She stresses the importance of teachers providing many opportunities for children to encounter a wide range of literature. Reading aloud and storytelling should be done daily. She claims a classroom book corner with time for children to choose and read stories is key to an effective curriculum. Golden also feels that teachers should encourage children to write their own stories. This will provide children with the chance to discover links between the reading and writing process. Creative drama, role playing, and storytelling are other options to try.

Results of a study by Borko and Eisenhart (1986) suggested that many of the reasons for student failure in learning to read are inherent in reading programs that are organized primarily according to student reading ability, teach reading skills sequentially, and stress silent and oral reading by students. She argues that in order

to provide poor readers with the experiences likely to change their conceptions of reading and reorient their efforts, it seems imperative to introduce flexibility into the criteria used to organize reading programs and evaluate success in these programs. She points out that if the goal of a reading program is to help students understand the importance of reading for meaning, then students must participate, at least some of the time, in activities in which comprehension is a highlighted and rewarded performance.

Implications for Research

Based on this research, the following can be recommended for further research:

1. Research further the unexpected finding that there is a statistically significant relationship between the type of school attended and the students' concepts of reading.
2. Focus research on one type of school, for example a parochial school, to determine how students respond to the question, "What is reading?"
3. Research an older grade level to determine how these students' concepts of reading might be more developed.
4. Research using a different comprehension tests' results.
5. Explore the sex of the student as another variable.

Summary

This chapter has considered implications for classroom practice in the areas of reading for meaning and developing a concept of reading. It also recommends possibilities for further research.

REFERENCES

- Ayers, D. and Downing, J. (1982). Testing children's concepts of reading. Educational Research, 24, 277-283.
- Bondy, E. (1990). Seeing it their way: what children's definitions of reading tell us about improving teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 41, 33-45.
- Borko, H. and Eisenhart, M. (1986) Students' conceptions of reading and their reading experiences. Elementary School Journal, 86, 589-611.
- Burns-Paterson, A. (1991). First and third graders' concepts of reading in different instructional settings. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 339 027)
- Canney, G. and Winograd. P. (1979). Schemata for reading and reading comprehension performance. Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.: Illinois University, Urbana. Center for the Study of Reading. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 169 520)
- Downing, J. (1969) How children think about reading. The Reading Teacher, 23, 217-230.
- Downing, J., Ollila, L., and Oliver, P. (1977). Concepts of language in children from differing socio-economic backgrounds. The Journal of Educational Research, 70, 277-280.
- Ehri Study (cited in Johns) (1980). First graders' concepts about print. Reading Research Quarterly, 15, 529-549.
- Freppon, P. (1991). Children's concepts of reading. Journal of Reading Behavior, 23, 139-163.
- Gates, A., and MacGinitie, W. Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (Survey D). New York: Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965.
- Golden, J. (1984). Children's concept of story in reading and writing. The Reading Teacher, 37, 578-584.
- Hoffman Study (cited in Borko, H. and Eisenhart, M.) (1984). Students' conceptions of reading and their reading experiences in school. Elementary School Journal, 86, 589-611.

- Huffman, G., Edwards, B., and Green, M. (1982). Developmental stages of metalinguistic awareness related to reading. Reading World, 21, 193-200.
- Johns, J. (1972). Children's concepts of reading and their reading achievement. Journal of Reading Behavior, 4, 56-57.
- Johns, J. and Ellis, D. (1976). Reading: Children tell it like it is. Reading World, 16, 115-128.
- Johns, J. (1980). First graders' concepts about print. Reading Research Quarterly, 15, 529-549.
- Lee, D. (1969). What is reading? The Reading Teacher, 22, 403-407.
- Lomax, R. and McGee, L. (1987). Young children's concepts about print and reading: toward a model of word reading acquisition. Reading Research Quarterly, 22, 237-255.
- Mason, G. (1967). Preschoolers' concepts of reading. The Reading Teacher, 21, 130-132.
- McLain, K. (1991). Metacognition in reading comprehension: what it is and strategies for instruction. Reading Improvement, 28, 169-172.
- Meloth, M. (1989). Teachers' concepts of reading, reading instruction, and students' concepts of reading. Journal of Teacher Education, 40, 33-39.
- Myers, M. and Paris, S. (1978). Children's metacognitive knowledge about reading. Journal of Educational Psychology, 70, 680-694.
- Ortiz, R. (1991). Increasing student awareness of the importance of reading. Journal of Reading, 34, 401-402.
- Purcell-Gates, V. and Dahl, K. (1991). Low SES children's success and failure at early literacy learning in skills-based classrooms. Journal of Reading Behavior, 23, 1-34.
- Rasinski, T. and Deford, D. (1988). First graders' conceptions of literacy: a matter of schooling. Theory into Practice, 27, 53-61.
- Reid, J. (1966). Learning to think about reading. Educational Research, 9, 56-62.

- Schenckner, P. (cited in Canney, G.) (1979). Schemata for reading and reading comprehension performance. Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.: Illinois University, Urbana. Center for the Study of Reading. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 169 520)
- Shapiro, J. and White, W. (1991). Reading attitudes and perceptions in traditional and nontraditional reading programs. Reading Research and Instruction, 30, 52-66.
- Templeton, S. and Thomas, P. (1984). Performance and reflection: young children's concept of word. Journal of Educational Research, 77, 139-146.
- Tovey, D. (1976). Children's perceptions of reading. The Reading Teacher, 29, 536-540.
- Tregaskes, M. and Daines, D. (1989). Effects of metacognition strategies on reading comprehension. Reading Research and Instruction, 29, 52-59.
- Vernon, M.D. (1957). Backwardness in reading. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1991). Random House, Inc. New York, New York.
- Weintraub, S. and Denny, T. (1965). What do beginning first graders say about reading? Childhood Education, 41, 326-327.
- Wittrock, M.C. (1986). Students' thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching (3rd ed.) (pp. 297-314). New York: Macmillan.

APPENDIX

Cramer's V

$$\text{Cramer's } V = \sqrt{\frac{x^2}{n * (K-1)}}$$

$$= \sqrt{\frac{8.484}{40 * (2-1)}}$$

$$= \sqrt{\frac{8.484}{40}}$$

$$= \sqrt{0.212}$$

$$= 0.46$$