



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr



Effects of reading instruction on learning outcomes in social studies: A synthesis of quantitative research ☆



Lisa V. McCulley*, David J. Osman

The University of Texas at Austin, 1912 Speedway D4900, Austin, TX 78712-1284, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 8 June 2015

Available online 29 July 2015

Keywords:

Social studies

Reading comprehension

Secondary students

Content acquisition

Research synthesis

Literacy instruction

ABSTRACT

Quantitative research studies examining the effects of literacy instruction set in social studies classrooms (grades 6–12) on students' academic content learning and reading comprehension are synthesized using meta-analytic techniques. An extensive search of the scholarly literature between 1983 and 2013 yielded a total of twelve intervention studies that provided literacy instruction to secondary students within social studies classes and quantitatively measured content learning outcomes, reading comprehension, or both. Findings revealed that content learning outcomes were consistently improved with instruction that included text-processing activities such as summarizing and generating questions. While many social studies teachers do not provide explicit reading supports, in part because they perceive that the time needed to do so is prohibitive, the findings of this synthesis suggest that sound reading practices hold promise as a means through which teachers can help students better access social studies content, thus improving student learning outcomes. More rigorous quantitative research is needed to further understand the causal effects of literacy practices in social studies settings.

Copyright © 2015, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

Introduction

As students progress out of elementary school to secondary schools, they are expected to transition from acquiring foundational reading skills to acquiring literacy skills and knowledge in specific content areas such as social studies (Gajria, Jitendra, Sood, & Sacks, 2007). This transition necessitates a significant instructional shift as the comprehension of informational text becomes increasingly vital to student academic success (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). In particular, students frequently struggle with the dual demand of content and literacy mastery, especially as comprehension activities become more abstract and focused on critical thinking (Bulgren, Deshler, & Lenz, 2007). A growing body of research indicates, however, that interventions and instructional practices can help general education social studies teachers balance these dual demands, enabling students to master both social studies content knowledge and reading comprehension. While recent syntheses have reviewed research on reading interventions in social studies classes for students with disabilities, this

☆ The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305F100013 to The University of Texas at Austin as part of the Reading for Understanding Research Initiative. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

* Corresponding author at: The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, The University of Texas at Austin, 1912 Speedway D4900, Austin, TX 78712-1284, USA. Tel.: +1 512 232 2357.

E-mail address: lisavmcculley@gmail.com (L.V. McCulley).

study attempts to summarize extant research with the goal of improving content knowledge or reading comprehension through literacy instruction in social studies classes.

Content demands and reading instruction in social studies

By the time students reach the secondary grades, content instruction is increasingly specialized. Most secondary social studies teachers consider themselves content experts, with little pedagogical knowledge about reading instruction. This issue is exacerbated by the reading demands of content area texts that are often beyond the reading proficiency of many students (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012). In secondary social studies classes, the use of difficult expository textbooks and challenging primary sources can make text inaccessible to many students. Clearly there is an interaction between text properties, reader, and comprehension (Yeari & van den Broek, 2011), with less skilled readers failing to recognize connections between successive paragraphs and whether the paragraphs are even related (Perfetti & Hart, 2001). Many adopted textbooks do not assist a reader in making connections because of ambiguous, distant referents or insufficient information to allow the reader to access background knowledge (Cirilo, 1981; Frederiksen, 1982). If a struggling reader is unable to make connections between prior and new information in such texts, comprehension suffers (Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991), which presents a considerable obstacle to social studies learning where the connections between past and present are crucial to making sense of historical information.

Commonly, secondary social studies teachers have had no formal reading courses as part of their undergraduate coursework (Ulusoy & Dedeoglu, 2011), and they may feel ill-equipped to assist struggling readers (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2008). In addition, social studies teachers, concerned that teaching reading strategies are an inefficient means to teach content knowledge, may resist the notion of sacrificing social studies content to make time for providing reading instruction (Conley, Kerner, & Reynolds, 2005; Moje, 2008). The issue of having insufficient time to address reading comprehension is reflected in the resounding teacher concern that social studies content is very broad, with many state standards that need to be “covered” (Cantrell et al., 2008; Caron, 2005). As a result, many secondary social studies teachers may rely on lecture and avoid regular use of text, or simply assign reading tasks to students with little regard for students’ abilities to comprehend it (Beck & Eno, 2012; Bolinger & Warren, 2007; Russell, 2010). In a recent observation study of middle and high school social studies teachers’ instructional practices, students across all observed social studies classes were required to read for only 10.4% of the total observed time (Swanson et al., 2015). When social studies teachers did require reading, they tended to expect students to do it independently with no explicit support from the teacher.

The Swanson et al. (2015) observation study demonstrates that, despite the crucial link of comprehension of informational or expository text to knowledge acquisition, social studies teachers frequently shy away from using text in their daily instructional practices. Comprehending expository text builds students’ background knowledge, which in turn contributes to future learning (Dochy, Segers, & Buchl, 1999). Because of this reciprocal relationship, instructional practices intended to improve students’ literacy practices in social studies classes may also improve their content knowledge. The recognition of this shared relationship is reflected in the emergence of the Common Core State Standards, which highlight the importance of academic, discipline-specific literacy, including literacy in the social studies (Evans & Clark, 2015; Kenna & Russell, 2014). Students are expected to identify key ideas from primary or secondary sources, analyze text structure, recognize competing perspectives of a historical event, and cite text evidence in support of a claim (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Previous research

Interventions and instructional practices designed to improve learning outcomes for students with learning disabilities using social studies content have been examined in previous studies and syntheses (Gajria et al., 2007; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2003). Findings suggest that practices such as providing a purpose for learning, engaging students in meaningful learning opportunities, and explicit instruction in the use of strategic tools that make learning concrete (e.g., mnemonics, graphic organizers) are associated with improved learning outcomes for students with learning disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2003). However, many of these studies were conducted in one-on-one or small-group settings, or in special education classrooms. Instruction and materials were frequently supplemental to the normal social studies instruction, using expository text or materials beyond those found in the regular social studies curriculum.

Recently, Swanson et al. (2012) authored a meta-analysis and synthesis of reading interventions using social studies content for students with learning disabilities. They conducted a systematic search for studies in which at least one outcome measure assessed social studies content learning or reading comprehension related to social studies concepts. They found that, across grade levels, reading interventions (e.g. graphic organizers, mnemonics, guided notes) using social studies content are particularly effective for students with learning disabilities.

Wade (1983) synthesized the research on reading instruction for all students in secondary social studies classes. In her review of studies between 1950 and 1980, Wade found that reading instruction in secondary social studies classes was positively related to students’ reading and study skills. Specifically, the most effective strategies involved direct instruction on reading strategies in social studies classes, along with purposeful reading during social studies instructional time. Frequently, students were taught to use several different strategies to improve reading comprehension. While the field of social studies research has grown substantially in the past 35 years, several issues that concerned Wade in 1983 continue to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/108326>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/108326>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)