

Title: “The Influence of Prior Knowledge and Text Genre on Readers’ Prediction Strategies”

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Grade Level: 3-8

Synopsis: Author’s Abstract: “This study examined the influence of prior knowledge and text genre on readers’ prediction strategies. Three groups of subjects read two genres of text (short stories and essays) and gave verbal reports of their prediction strategies while reading. Next, subjects rated the texts in terms of relative familiarity of text content. Quantitative analysis of the think-aloud protocols indicated statistically significant differences in frequency of reports of predictions for particular texts. Subjects reported making significantly more predictions on essays rated more familiar, and on the story that was rated more familiar. There were no significant differences in frequency of reported predictions on the short story and essay that were rated most familiar. Results indicate that readers’ prior knowledge for the content of the text may significantly influence the nature of readers’ prediction strategies. Qualitative analysis of protocols allowed for examination of the variation in the types of predictions and prediction-related strategies that were used by readers in this study. Implications of findings for reading comprehension theory and educational practice are discussed.” (p. 131)

Detail: An earlier study (Olson, Mack, & Duffy, 1981) concluded that readers make rich predictions only when reading stories, not when reading essays. The researchers argued that genre has a significant influence on predictions; the story genre encourages predictions, while essays discourage readers from making predictions. However, studies by Afflerbach (1990) and Johnson & Afflerbach (1985) in which readers of essays were asked to think aloud showed that these readers made many predictions while reading essays.

The current study was done to look into the relationship of genre and prior knowledge to making predictions, and to resolve the apparent conflict between the two preceding sets of studies. The study was done using graduate students and 11th-grade students in the gifted English program of their high school. The subjects were chosen to represent “competent readers.” Subjects read two stories and three essays. Each subject met alone with a researcher and read the five texts, reporting aloud on strategies being used as they read. Their verbal reports were tape recorded. They were then asked to rate the five texts on familiarity of content.

Reports were analyzed for nature and frequency of predictions. Text genre did not determine the frequency of predictions. Readers made just as many predictions for the most familiar essay as they did for the most familiar short story. What did influence frequency of predictions was familiarity with the content and text structure of the story or essay.

Qualitative analysis of reports found that competent readers used these specific strategies:

Cues used to generate predictions: Prior knowledge of content and knowledge of text structure helped readers focus on cues in the text, and the cues helped trigger “appropriate schemata.”

Readers monitored the appropriateness of predictions as they continued reading. If the reader had little prior knowledge of a subject, the reader would limit the number of predictions made or make no predictions. (“I’m not sure what to expect . . . from the title . . . I’m just going to take a wait-and-see-attitude.”) If several predictions were made and not yet confirmed, the reader would decide not to make any more predictions until the initial ones were confirmed. Modification of a prediction was also an indication of comprehension monitoring.

Predictions were also sometimes related to affect. The reader would predict the quality of the interaction they would have with the text. (“It seems he’s not really developing it quick enough. . . . He has got to prove to me. . . .” OR “I’m thinking I’m probably not going to enjoy this article as well.” OR “This will be a fun thing to read.”)

These data “may be used to inform prediction instruction for developing readers. For example, cue use and comprehension monitoring prediction strategies could be modeled for students as part of their comprehension instruction.” (p. 146) Comprehension instruction should help students use a combination of predictions and comprehension monitoring as they read. Students should be taught that prediction is a useful strategy for all types of genre. They should be encouraged to determine their prior knowledge before reading and use this knowledge to generate predictions.

Quote(s): “The results of . . . experimental research suggest that generating and monitoring predictions are important comprehension strategies which readers use in constructing meaning from text.” (p. 132)

“The results of this study indicate that prior knowledge significantly influences readers’ predictions and prediction-related strategies.” (p. 141)

“After generating predictions and determining their accuracy and appropriateness through the use of comprehension monitoring, readers verified their predictions.” (p. 144)

“Competent readers predict and then modify and verify their predictions in the process of building a model of the text being read.” (p. 144)

“Analysis of the quantitative results of this study indicates that prediction is an important comprehension strategy which readers use to construct meaning for both essay (expository) and story (narrative) genres.” (p. 145)

“These findings suggest that prediction is a valuable reading strategy for readers of both familiar and unfamiliar essays and stories, provided the reader is capable of knowing when prediction strategies (and the type and scope of the predictions) are appropriate. After generating predictions, the

readers in this study monitored their predictions, checking them against subsequent information from the text. In this sense, prediction was an important part of competent readers' metacognitive strategies." (pp. 145–146)

"This data may be used to inform prediction instruction for developing readers. For example, cue use and comprehension monitoring prediction strategies could be modeled for students as part of their comprehension instruction." (p. 146)