

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Reading Comprehension: Assisting Children with Learning Difficulties

by Gary Woolley

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Reviewed by/ Revu par

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Reading Comprehension: Assisting Children with Learning Difficulties by Gary Woolley is a general consensus of the possibilities for reading comprehension instruction for students who struggle with reading, including those with reading disabilities and those learning a second language, with a focus on practices in the United States of America and Australia. While much of the focus of Woolley's book is on students with reading disabilities, or factors which may affect their reading, it is a common practice for second language learners to be identified as having reading difficulties, regardless of their reading ability in their native language (Kiefer, 2010). Woolley acknowledges this when he notes that the popular belief that "learning and reading difficulties are predominately a result of deficiencies within the reader is considered too narrow a focus and ignores the range and complexity of social, educational, cultural, and environmental factors that influence reading" (p. 8). Even within a single language, students may experience reading difficulties not because of their cognitive ability but because of their sociocultural or dialect differences.

Another common belief concerning reading is the simple view that decoding and listening comprehension proficiency will lead to reading comprehension (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Woolley acknowledges this simple view, but quickly rebuffs it, thoroughly explaining the complexities of reading, specifically comprehension. This complex view of reading, which acknowledges reader factors, is the current view held by student-centred and constructivist instructors.

In general, Woolley's book may be most appropriate as an introductory text for pre-service teachers, especially those teaching diverse students in the intermediate and secondary grades. The book begins with an introduction to the complex definitions of literacy and comprehension, with acknowledgements that both are multifaceted and not easily explained. Next, brain functioning and reading disabilities, with specific explanations given for dyslexia, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This encompasses the first quarter of the book. After this introductory information, Woolley discusses some basic decoding issues and how to address fluency and vocabulary concerns. After this, the focus shifts to higher-order comprehension skills with specific chapters devoted to visualization and inferences, with some strategies provided. From this explanation, Woolley discusses other factors that may impact reading comprehension, such as text structure, content, motivation, regulation, and engagement.

Finally, the last quarter of the book introduces practitioner factors, namely, how to provide instruction in reading strategies and how to incorporate these strategies in a framework, using activities before, during, and after reading, as well as visual and verbal stimulus. The book concludes with a discussion of tutoring types (such as parent and peer tutoring), emphasizing the importance of dialogue and cooperation, and using dynamic and multiple assessments when determining reading needs and progress. Throughout the book, Woolley makes an effort to explain how these strategies benefit students with reading disabilities, especially those with limited working memory capacity, and occasionally refers to student diversity.

Overall, *Reading Comprehension* works as an introductory text for general education, special education, and second language learner teachers, as the text explicitly outlines the reading process and how comprehension problems may be remediated. Throughout the book, possible causes of different reading problems are identified as ways to match student needs with appropriate remediation strategies. Also, one can see that Woolley bases the information in his book on sound practices, as research is consistently referenced, with some studies discussed in detail. The research used includes studies that are both current and landmark, having had major influences on reading practice, such as the research undertaken by the National Reading Panel in the United States. Finally, Woolley rejects out-of-favour simple views of reading and focuses on higher-order comprehension skills that allow for more student-centred methods. Teachers are also able to incorporate these higher-order skills, such as inferencing, in their classroom practices as

specific strategies are given and a framework (basically a structure used to teach reading) in which to incorporate the strategies is explained.

One shortcoming of Woolley's book is that it is heavy on explanations and short on examples. Overall, the book is based more in theory than in practice and provides few examples of teachers using the strategies within their classrooms. There are some portions of the book in which Woolley provides scenarios in which students are exhibiting good reading practices or teachers are using one of the strategies described in the text. The book is set up in a simple outline fashion that makes it easy to read and/or find information, yet could be more beneficial to practitioners if more examples were given on the use of specific strategies. Also, the amount of examples provided for specific strategies vary in number, although different graphic organizers and cooperative learning techniques are given reference. For example, two comprehension skills, visualization and inferencing, which have chapters devoted to them and are frequently referred to throughout the book, have about seven and three strategies provided, respectively.

Reading Comprehension could be an important addition to reading teachers' libraries. Woolley espouses the idea that engagement and motivation are important aspects of any comprehension curriculum, and highlights student-centred curriculums. He also strongly asserts that prior knowledge (and its activation) is necessary for reading comprehension, especially when using higher-order skills like making inferences. This book may also benefit researchers as it provides a summary literature review of current trends in reading comprehension and can act as a springboard for future areas of study. In conclusion, the book provides an introduction to the complex process of reading comprehension and how to work with the student and his/her environment to remediate any reading difficulties, regardless of whether these are due to a disability, lack of language acquisition, or an unknown factor.

References

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