

Research

Teacher Questioning and Reading

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In 1917, Thorndike outlined a classic definition of reading in three words: “Reading is thinking.” Conversation (1967) still concerned with reading as thinking with regard to how varied reading-thinking skills can be developed within the classroom.

This study explored the following questions:

1. What kinds of thinking questions do teachers ask about reading assignments in selected second, fourth, and sixth grade classrooms? In what frequencies do the various question types occur?
2. How frequently are teacher questions about reading assignments met with congruent or correct student responses?
3. Do teachers employ certain questioning strategies as they question students about reading assignments? If so, what are the characteristics of these strategies?

Conclusions and Implications:

1. 70 of 100 questions in literal comprehension—which may be justified; however, unjustifiable is the involvement of these so-called literal comprehension questions with retrieval of the trivial factual makeup on stories. In real life reading situations, readers seldom approach reading with the purpose of trying to commit all the minute facts to memory. Rather, the reader is more interested in getting broad understandings of the material.
2. Students invariably are sensitive to “what teachers want” and generally do a good job of supplying it. Very evident with regard to questions about reading when one notes that over 90 per cent of all literal comprehension questions are met with congruent responses on the first student try. About the only thing that appears to be programmed into the students is the nearly flawless ability to anticipate the trivial nature of teachers’ literal questions, and parrot back an endless recollection of trivia.
3. If educators want to condition students for irresponsible citizen ship, it seems quite appropriate to ask children to unsupported value statements. It seems imperative that teachers pattern the all-important “why” questions after students take positions. Until such is the common practice it seems that teachers will condition students to take value positions without the vital weighing of evidence that seems to separate the thinking individual from the mob member.