

Running head: TEST STRATEGIES

Test Taking Strategies:

In Primary Grades

Michelle Pederson

Educational Research 803

Test Taking Strategies: In Primary Grades

Today students are faced with an abundant amount of tests in all grades. The tests are becoming more important and higher expectations of students are becoming evident. Students in Kindergarten are beginning to receive standardized tests to identify students that are further behind or not meeting expectations. As these tests become more important and younger grades are beginning to take high stakes tests, when will these students learn the strategies to help them perform better?

One area that has not been addressed is teaching students in the primary grades Kindergarten to second grade test taking strategies. Students as they move into third grade are taught these skills, but would it benefit younger grades to begin teaching these strategies to students. This brief study will address the question, "Does teaching student's specific test taking strategies improve student test scores?"

Review of Literature:

Students are given tests each semester, if not each week throughout their education. As students take these tests, do they understand the importance of knowing specific test taking strategies that will aid them in improving their test scores. Several scholars have identified various strategies that have been proven to improve students test scores. There are two different areas to consider when identifying what will aid students with tests: test-wiseness or test taking strategies (Hock & Hellard, 2005).

Cohen (1998) distinguishes between *test-wiseness strategies* and *test-taking strategies*. Test-wiseness strategies are not necessarily determined by proficiency in the language being assessed, but rather may be dependent on the respondent's knowledge of how to take tests. Test-taking strategies, in contrast, consist of language use strategies when they are used to help produce response to language testing tasks. As a teacher determining whether students need to be taught test-wiseness or test-taking strategies is vital.

Stough's (1993) and Powell's (2000) research shows that by teaching students test-wiseness strategies their scores will increase regardless of the test. A few of the strategies recommended for teaching are read all questions first, underline key words in questions, monitor

your time, do not skip any questions, cross out answers known to be incorrect and many more (Powell, 2000). Research from the field of reading (Armbruster & Anderson, 1984; Nist & Kirby, 1989) believes that underlining information from the text aids in comprehension while reading test questions. Scholars believe that students that are taught test-wiseness will be able to improve their multiple choice test scores (Cohen, 1998; Powell, 2000, & Stough, 1993).

According to Cohen and Upton (2007) test taking strategies are defined as those test-taking processes which the respondents have selected and which they are conscious of, at least to some degree. There are several strategies that can be used to aid students in comprehension of what they are reading. Having students rephrase the question will help them to understand what the question is asking (Atkinson, 1993). Another test strategy students may use is looking for markers of meaning in the passage, such as definitions, indicators of key ideas, guides to paragraph development (Stough, 1993). Through these strategies students begin to learn various strategies to aid them in taking tests.

The studies that have been conducted have involved students in intermediate grades, high school students, and adults. Upon reviewing the data these skills work for older students, so investigating if they work for younger students will be what this study focuses on. After teaching students specific test taking strategies, they will be able to apply these strategies to their reading tests and their tests should show evidence of using the various strategies taught.

Methodology:

Participants

The students that participated in this study were students that were in the 2nd grade. There were six boys and fifteen girls, for a total of twenty-one students. These students ranged in ability from low academically to high. The students were given all the same tests and all taught the same material.

Materials

To complete this project a reading passage that is at a 2nd grade level will be used. One will need highlighters, plastic sleeves, dry erase markers, and sticky notes to aid in teaching the various strategies. The teacher will also need practice passages and questions for each time a new strategy is taught and for various practice sessions. For the striker strategy students will

need to have previously designed questions with answers to teach them to cross out answers that they know are not correct. For teaching the highlighting technique each student will need a copy of questions and a highlighter to participate. With instructing the sticky note strategy, students will all need several sticky notes and a pencil. With proving their answers each student will need a plastic sleeve with the story already in it along with a dry erase marker to write on the plastic sleeve. To aid the students in remembering the strategies, a large poster board to write down a strategy after it is taught, so students can refer back to the list.

Procedure

Students will be administered a pre-test to determine what strategies they know and use. After a baseline is identified four strategies will be instructed throughout the school year. A month will be allowed for each strategy to be taught and practiced. In September/October the striker strategy will be taught, November/December the highlighting of important words in questions, January/February the rephrasing the question on a sticky note will be taught, and finally March/April the strategy of finding and highlighting the answer within a passage will be instructed. A final assessment will be administered in May, the same as the pre-test, indentifying what strategies students use. The tests will be compared looking at strategies the students used to help them determine their answers. From the results teachers will be able to determine if the teaching students at this age test taking strategies were beneficial.

Conclusion

Upon completing the research for this paper there are numerous strategies that will benefit students of all ages. The strategies that were taught to the 2nd grade students were age appropriate and modified for their level. Through these strategies students will begin to learn how to take multiple choice tests effectively and confidently. Students will need to continue practicing, but what can begin being taught at the younger grade levels will only aid them when they reach older grades and more standardized tests.

References:

- Armbruster, T., & Anderson, B. B. (1984). Studying. In *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 471-501). New York: Longman.
- Atkinson, R. (1993). *Study skills. Test taking*. Baton Rouge.
- Cohen, A. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc.
- Cohen, M., & Upton, T. (2007). I want to go back to the test. *Language Testing* , 209-250.
- Hock, M., & Hellard, D. (2005). Reading comprehension strategies for adult literacy outcomes. *International Reading Association* , 192-200.
- Nist, S., & Kirby, K. (1989). The test marking patterns of college students. *Reading Psychology: An International Quarter 10* , 321-338.
- Powell, S. (2000). *Super strategies for succeeding on the standardized tests; Reading/Language arts*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books.
- Stough, L. (1993). *Research on multiple choice questions: Implications for Strategy Instruction*. San Antonio.