

Integrating Evidence-Based Reading into Middle-School Instruction: Exploring Sustainability



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Abstract

Reading comprehension models implemented in content classrooms boost adolescent reading achievement. Yet, few researchers examine how such models are incorporated into teachers' daily instruction. We used extended observations and interviews to examine the integration of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), an evidence-based reading comprehension model, into the instructional practices of fifteen middle school content teachers. High integration teachers embedded CSR lessons into their curriculum and reinforced CSR strategy use throughout the week. These teachers felt supported in their efforts by colleagues and school administrators. There is much to be learned from the ways in which teachers engage in the art of integrating new methods into their teaching.

Problem/Purpose

Academic literacy, "reading proficiency required to construct meaning from content texts" (Torgesen et al., 2007, p. 3) is key to gaining content knowledge (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Providing evidence-based reading instruction in content subjects improves adolescents' reading abilities (Swanson et al., 2015). Sustaining the use of such practices over time is critical in developing academic literacy. Coburn et al. (2012) defined sustainability as "the degree to which teachers use practices in high-quality ways after support has dissipated (p. 140)." We theorized how educators *integrate* a new model into existing practices over time provides a better view of sustainability. This study focused on how content teachers integrated an evidence-based reading comprehension model, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), into their weekly instruction one year after researcher support ended.

Literature Review

Sustaining evidence-based practices over time is challenging, yet research indicates certain key features: (a) appropriateness of the practice for the context, (b) continued ongoing support (i.e., training, coaching), and (c) adapting practices for the context (Klingner, Boardman, & McMaster, 2013). While fidelity to an evidence-based practice may support sustainability, other research suggests that sustainability is linked to contextual factors. Even when found effective in randomized efficacy studies, evidence-based practices are often sustained in some settings but not others (Buckley et al., 2017). We suggest that models such as CSR, which may be interpreted as an add-on to regular instruction, may be particularly vulnerable to issues of sustainability. A focus on fidelity to measure quality both initially and after research support has ended may miss a key contextual factor - how teachers *integrate* that practice into their regular teaching routine.

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Methods

CSR: The Larger Study

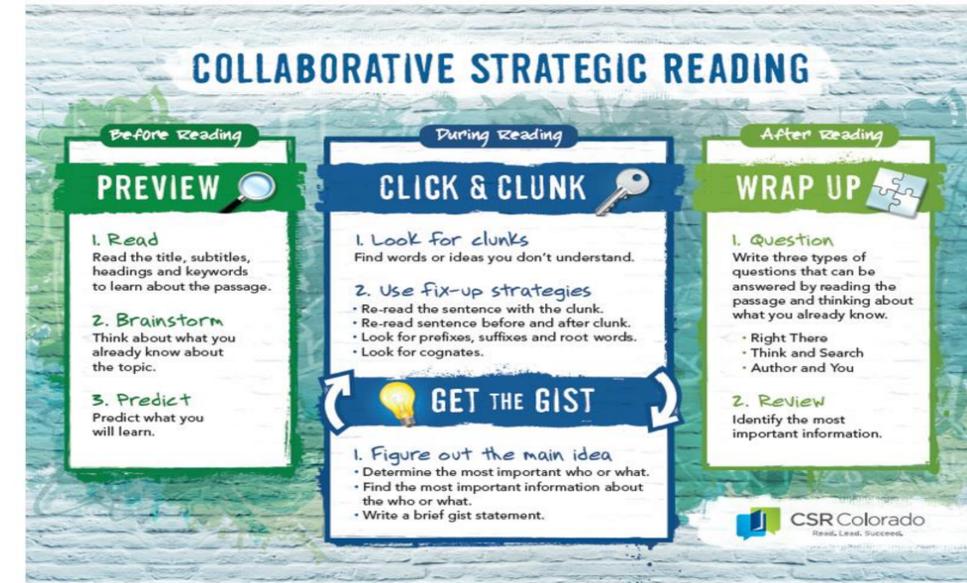
In our five-year study, researchers worked with an urban school district to examine the effectiveness and sustainability of CSR across 18 middle schools (Boardman et al., 2016). University researchers supported the school district to provide CSR support in the second year of implementation. In year five we examined sustainability after university support was removed and all support for CSR was provided by the school district.

Setting/Participants

Participants included 15 CSR teachers: one social studies, one science and one language arts teacher from five case-study schools.

Data Collection/Analysis

Participants were observed daily for a week by university researchers. Two researchers used the Implementation Validity Checklist-Revised (IVC-R), an observation protocol for recording teacher/student behaviors adhering to the CSR model (Buckley et al., 2017), to determine fidelity to CSR. Participants were interviewed following their observations. We used a qualitative, concurrent triangulation approach to confirm or disconfirm findings from our data sources.



Teacher	Content Taught	Number of CSR Strategies Used Over the Week	Percentage of Time Students Worked in Collaborative Groups	Fidelity of CSR Lesson	Content of CSR Lesson Aligned with Content of the Week
High Integration					
Ms. Edwards	Language Arts	15	61%	4.5	Yes
Ms. Emmers	Social Studies	19	70%	5.5	Yes
Ms. Kalstrom	Language Arts	10	87%	5.0	Yes
Ms. Amistad	Science	17	70%	5.0	Yes
Mr. Ivey	Social Studies	14	60%	4.0	Yes
Ms. Owen	Social Studies	13	58%	4.5	Yes
Moderate Integration					
Ms. Lynn	Social Studies	26	53%	6.0	No
Mr. Clifton	Science	11	55%	4.0	No
Ms. Jasper	Language Arts	15	20%	2.5	No
Ms. Loughran	Science	9	59%	3.0	No
Mr. Wesley	Science	9	28%	3.0	Yes
Marginal Integration					
Mr. Davidson	Science	6	21%	3.0	Yes
Ms. Melborn	Language Arts	8	33%	3.5	No
Mr. Thomas	Social Studies	8	8%	1.0	No
Ms. Delaney	Language Arts	9	20%	2.0	No

Findings

In order to better understand sustainability of evidence-based practices that foster academic literacy, we need to know more about how these practices are integrated into teachers' instructional routines.

Six participants demonstrated high integration of CSR, consistently using more CSR components and strategies on both CSR and non-CSR days and using small group collaborative structures more on their CSR days compared with other teachers in our study. Five participants demonstrated moderate integration of CSR. This category showed the most variability. Four participants demonstrated marginal integration of CSR. Compared with other teachers in our study, marginal integration teachers consistently used fewer CSR components and strategies on both CSR and non-CSR days. Overall fidelity in year five was comparable to moderate integration teachers, but lower than high integration teachers in our study. However, fidelity for the CSR lesson observed during our week of instruction was considerably lower.

Implications

Teachers with higher integration of the CSR model appropriated CSR in richer conceptual ways, using the model to foster academic literacy as a means toward developing disciplinary knowledge. Often, content teachers may not identify as reading teachers, so integrating evidence-based reading comprehension strategies into content teaching involves a shift in conceptual thinking. Such shifts in thinking take time. For school leadership, this means being cognizant of quickly shifting school foci to adopt the next touted program. For professional development providers, it means providing differentiated coaching (Klingner, Boardman, & McMaster, 2013) that builds capacity for relevance, examining theory (e.g., what is academic literacy) and practice (e.g., guide teachers in using data and observation to see impact of the practice). Emphasize fidelity of implementation for learning the core features of the practice which supports teachers with low self-efficacy in teaching reading. Then, foster productive adaptations that support the seamless integration of the practice into existing content instruction.