Teaching reading literacy practices: are they patterns of differences between English-speaking and French-speaking education systems

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Data and methods

• Data from the teachers’ questionnaires of PIRLS 2011 have been used.

• The IEA PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) is a comparative large-scale study aimed at assessing pupils’ reading literacy at grade 4 (age 10).

• Variables: development of skills/competencies, type of reading material used, types of activities/assessments used in reading.
Data and methods

• **Countries/education systems**: 3 (or 5) English-speaking (highly performing and formal reading begins at age 6) AND 3 French-speaking.

• **Statistics**: descriptive.

• **Tables**: % of students exposed to activities at least once a week.
Skills and competencies

- Determine the author's perspective or intention
- Describe the style or structure of the text they have read
- Make generalizations and draw inferences based on what they have read
- Make predictions about what will happen next in the text they are reading
- Compare what they have read with other things they have read
- Compare what they have read with experiences they have had
- Explain or support their understanding of what they have read
- Identify the main ideas of what they have read
- Locate information within the text
Skills and competencies

1) 3 basic skills and competencies very commonly used in all education systems:
   - Explain or support their understanding
   - Identify the main idea
   - Locate information

2) 6 more sophisticated skills are quite often used in the US, Ontario, Ireland and less often used in French context:
   - Determine the author's perspective or intention
   - Describe the style or structure of the text they have read
   - Make generalizations and draw inferences
   - Make predictions about what will happen next
   - Compare what they have read with other things they have read
   - Compare what they have read with their experience
Activities/teaching practices

- Teach or model skimming or scanning strategies
- Teach students new vocabulary systematically
- Teach students strategies for decoding sounds and words
- Give students time to read books of their own choosing
- Ask students to read silently on their own
- Ask students to read aloud
- Read aloud to the class
Activities/teaching practices

1) 3 activities are very commonly used in all education systems:
   - « Ask students to read aloud »
   - « Read aloud to the class »
   - « Ask students to read silently on their own »

2) For the 4 other activities and teaching practices, there are noticeable differences between education systems:
   - “Teach students strategies for decoding sounds and words” is common practice in English-speaking countries and Québec, less frequent in France and BFS;
   - “Give students time to read books of their own choosing”: same pattern, more autonomy and choice in ES and Québec;
   - “Teach students new vocabulary systematically” is widespread in all countries but Belgium FS;
   - “Teach or model skimming or scanning strategies” is not frequent in grade 4 classes, but significantly more often used in English-speaking countries and Québec, less frequent in France and BFS.
Activities/assessments

- Take a written quiz or test about what they have read
- Talk with each other about what they have read
- Answer oral questions about or orally summarize what they have read
- Write something about or in response to what they have read

Chart showing percentage of activities/assessments in various countries:

- Northern Ireland
- England
- USA
- Ontario
- Ireland
- Quebec
- Belgium French
- France

Legend:
- Pink - Northern Ireland
- Blue - England
- Orange - USA
- Green - Ontario
- Purple - Ireland
- Olive Green - Quebec
- Brown - France
- Blue - Belgium French
Activities/assessments

1. Oral questions or orally summarize are common practices.

2. Write something in answer is common in English-speaking countries and not common at all in the French-speaking ones.

3. Variation in the use of written quizz.
Reading material

- No variation in short stories
- Non-fiction is more often used in most of the ES countries and in Québec than in France and Belgium
- Long fiction books are not used in Belgium, much more frequent in Ontario, Ireland, UK and France.
Conclusions

• Some competencies, skills, practices are commonly used in all education systems. Typically they are the least challenging or more traditional ones: read silently, read aloud, taking quizzes, answer oral questions, locate information, summarize, use of short texts...

• For more demanding or challenging activities, some clear-cut differences were observed between the different education systems compared, showing a diversity in reading literacy teaching practices.

• On some occasions (8 items), the pattern was a linguistic pattern: English vs French speaking;

• On other occasions (3 items), the pattern was more cultural: UK + North America vs French-speaking European countries;

• On other occasions (3 items), the differences were just country differences.
Conclusions

• All in all, this was not random, there were patterns of practices that can be related to what is known about effective teaching practices.

• In the best performing English-speaking countries, pupils had more OTL or exposure
  a) to more demanding and diverse texts;
  b) teaching practices aimed at developing deep understanding (such as drawing inferences, compare with other readings or relate reading to their experience, make predictions, learn to browse a text...).

• In the country scoring the lowest, pupils had really limited exposure to effective reading strategies and limited experience with demanding texts.
Limitations

• The approach is just descriptive; we do not claim any causal link between the teaching practices and performance.
• PIRLS data are cross-sectional.
• Data are self-reported by teachers.
• Within countries, correlations of teaching practices with reading achievement are low (lack of variation or covariance with other variables).