Kane elementary school bartlesville ok

In the early grades, American schools value reading-understanding skills over knowledge. The results are devastating, especially for poor children. Natalie Wexler August 2019 Issue Justyna Stasik At first glance, the classroom I visited at a high-poverty school in Washington, D.C., seemed like a model of diligentness. The teacher sat at a desk in the corner and went over student work, while first-graders quietly filled out a spreadsheet intended to develop their literacy skills. When I looked around, I noticed a little girl drawing on a piece of paper. Ten minutes later, she had sketched a variety of human figures, and was busy coloring them yellow. I knelt next to her and asked, what are you drawing? Clowns, she replied confidently. Why are you drawing clowns? Because it says here, Draw clowns, she explained. Running down the left side of the worksheet was a list of reading comprehension skills: find the main idea, make inferences, make predictions. The girl pointed to the expression draw conclusions. She was going to make inferences and draw conclusions about a close article describing Brazil, which lay face down on her desk. But she wasn't aware that the text was there until I turned it around. More to the point, she had never heard of Brazil and was unable to read the word. That girl's mission was just one example, albeit an egregious one, of a standard educational approach. American elementary education has been shaped by a theory that goes like this: Reading— a term used to mean not only matching letters to sounds, but also understanding— can be taught in a way that is completely disconnected from content. Use simple texts to teach children how to find the main idea, make inferences, draw conclusions, and so on, and eventually they will be able to use these skills to understand the meaning of something that is set in front of them. In the meantime, children don't really matter — it's better for them to acquire skills that enable them to discover knowledge for themselves later than for them to be given information directly, or so the thinking goes. That is, they have to spend their time learning to read before reading to learn. Science can wait; history, which is considered too abstract for young minds to understand, must wait. Instead, the reading time is filled with a series of short books and scriptures that are not connected to each other, except for the understanding skills they are meant to teach. As far back as 1977, early elementary teachers spent more than twice as much time reading as in science and social sciences combined. But since 2001, when the federal No Child Left Behind legislation made standardized reading and math score the benchmark to measure progress, time devoted to both subjects has only grown. In turn, time spent on social sciences and science has fallen – especially in schools where test scores are low. And yet, despite the enormous expenses of time and resources on American children have not become better readers. In the past 20 years, only about a third of students have scored on or above the skilled level of national tests. For low-income and minority children, the picture is particularly bleak: Their average test scores are far below those of their more affluent, mostly white peers - a phenomenon commonly called the achievement gap. As this gap has widened, America's position in international literacy and literacy rankings has fallen. We seem to be falling as other systems improve, a federal official who oversees the administration of such tests told Education Week.Anyone who raises a disturbing question: What if the medication we have prescribing is only making matters worse, especially for poor children? What if the best way to increase reading comprehension is not to teach children discreet skills, but to teach them, as early as possible, the things we have marginalized — including history, science, and other content that can build up the knowledge and vocabulary they need to understand both written texts and the world around them? In the late 1980s, two researchers in Wisconsin, Donna Recht and Lauren Leslie, designed an ingenious experiment to try to determine the extent to which a child's reading ability depends on her prior knowledge of a subject. To this end, they constructed a miniature baseball field and folked it with three baseball players. Then they brought in 64 seventh and eighth graders who had been tested both for their reading ability and their knowledge of baseball. Recht and Leslie chose baseball because they realized a lot of kids who weren't good readers still knew a great deal about the game. Each student was asked to first read a description of a fictional baseball inning and then move wooden figures to reenact it. (For example: Churniak swings and hits a slow bouncing ball toward shortstop. Haley comes in, fields it, and throws to first, but too late. Churniak is on first with a single, Johnson stayed in third. The next batter is Whitcomb, the Cougars left-fielder.) It turned out that past knowledge of baseball made a big difference in students' ability to understand the text —more than their supposed reading level. The kids who knew little about baseball, including the good readers, did badly. And all those who knew a lot about baseball, whether they were good or bad readers, did well. In fact, the bad readers who knew a lot about baseball surpassed the good readers who didn't. About 25 years later, a variation on the baseball study sheds further light on the relationship between knowledge and understanding. This team of researchers focused on preschoolers from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. First, they read a book about birds, a topic they had determined the higher-income children knew more about than the lower-income people. When they tested understanding, the researchers found that the richer children significantly better. But then they read a story involving a topic none of the groups knew anything about: up-and-coming animals called wugs. When the children's priorities were similar, their understanding was essentially the same. In other words, the gap in understanding was not a gap in skills. There was a gap in knowledge. For a number of reasons, children from better educated families — who also tend to have higher incomes — come to school with more knowledge and vocabulary. In the early grades, teachers have told me that children from less educated families may not know basic words as behind. I saw a first-grader struggling with a simple mathematical problem because he didn't know the meaning of before. As the years go by, children of educated parents continue to acquire more knowledge and vocabulary outside of school, making it easier for them to gain even more knowledge — because knowledge, like Velcro, best adheres to other related knowledge. Meanwhile, their less fortunate peers fall further and further behind, especially if schools don't give them knowledge. This snowballing has been called the Matthew effect, after the gospel passage, according to Matthew, if the rich get richer and the poor become poorer. Every year that matthew effect is allowed to continue, it becomes harder to reverse. So the earlier we start building children's knowledge, the better the chances of narrowing the gap. While in some respects American schools vary enormously, in almost every elementary classroom you will find the same basic structure. The day is divided into a math block and a reading block, the latter of which uses anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours. In perhaps half of all primary schools, teachers should use a reading textbook containing a variety of scriptures, discussion questions, and a teacher's guide. In other schools, teachers are left to their own devices to figure out how to teach reading, and rely on commercially available children's books. In both cases, when it comes to teaching intervention, the emphasis is on skills. And the overwhelming majority of teachers turn to the internet to supplement these materials, despite not being trained in curriculum design. A Rand Corporation survey of teachers found that 95 percent of elementary school teachers resort to Google for materials and lesson plans; Eighty-six percent turn to Pinterest. Typically, a teacher will focus on a week's skill, reading aloud books or scriptures selected not for the content, but for how well they lend themselves to demonstrating a given skill. However, the demonstration of this skill may not involve reading at all. A common way to model the skills to compare and contrast, for example, is to bring two children to the front of the room and lead a discussion about the similarities and differences in what they are wearing. Students will then practice their skills on their own or in small groups during teacher guidance, read determined to be at their individual reading level, which may be far below their grade level. Again, the books do not cohere around any particular subject; many are simple fiction. The theory is that if students just read enough, and spend enough time practicing understanding skills, they will eventually be able to understand more complex texts. Many teachers have told me that they want to spend more time on social sciences and science, because students clearly like to learn actual content. But they have been informed that teaching skills are the way to increase reading understanding. Education policy makers and reformers have generally not questioned this approach, and indeed, by raising the importance of reading scores, has intensified it. Parents, like teachers, may object to the emphasis on test prep, but they have not focused on the more fundamental problem. If students lack the knowledge and vocabulary to understand the passages on reading tests, they will not be able to demonstrate their skills in making inferences or finding the primary idea. And if they come to high school without having been exposed to history or science, as is the case for many students from low-income families, they will not be able to read and understand materials at the high school level. Common Core literacy standards, which since 2010 have influenced classroom practices in most states, have in many ways made a bad situation worse. In an effort to expand children's knowledge, the standards require primary school teachers to expose all pupils to more complex writing and more non-fiction. This may seem like a step in the right direction, but nonfiction generally requires even more background knowledge and vocabulary than fiction does. When nonfiction is combined with the competence-focused approach – as it has been in most classrooms – the results can be disastrous. Teachers can put impenetrable text in front of the children and just let them struggle. Or maybe draw clowns. In a small number of American schools, things are starting to change. A few years ago, there was no such thing as an elementary literacy plan that focused on building knowledge. Now there are several, including a few available online at no cost. Some have been adopted by entire school districts -- including high-poverty like Baltimore and Detroit -- while others are implemented by charter networks or individual schools. The curricula vary in their information, but all are organized by themes or topics rather than skills. In one, first-graders learn about ancient Mesopotamia and second-graders studying Greek myths. In another, gardeners spend months learning about trees, and first-graders are exploring birds. Children usually find these topics – including and perhaps especially the historical ones – far more engaging than a steady diet of skills. In schools that use these new curricula, all students struggle with the same texts, some of which are read aloud by teachers. Children also spend time day reading independently, at varying levels of complexity. But struggling readers are not limited to the simple concepts and vocabulary they can access through their own reading. Teachers tend to be surprised at how quickly children absorb sophisticated vocabulary (such as fruitful and adversary) and learn to make connections between different topics. As promising as some of the early results are, it seems reasonable to ask: With inequality increasing and an increasing proportion of American students coming from low-income families, can any curriculum really level the playing field? The relatively few schools that have adopted knowledge-building primary school curricula may have difficulty using test scores to prove that the approach can work, because it can take years for low-income students to acquire enough general knowledge to perform as well as their more affluent peers. And yet there is evidence – on a large scale – that this kind of elementary curriculum can reduce inequality, thanks to an accidental experiment conducted in France. As E. D. Hirsch Jr. explains in his book Why Knowledge Matters, until 1989, all French schools were required to follow a detailed, content-focused national curriculum. If a child from a low-income family started public preschool at the age of 2, after 10 years, she would almost have caught up to a very advantageous child who had started at the age of 4. Then, a new law urged elementary schools to adopt the American approach, foreground skills such as critical thinking and learning to learn. The results were dramatic. Over the next 20 years, performance levels decreased sharply for all pupils – and the decrease was greatest among those in need. The United States can not only adopt the kind of comprehensive national curriculum that France once had (and that countries that surpass us on international tests still have). According to U.S. law and custom, the curriculum is determined at the local level. Yet much can be done by individual schools and districts —and even states—to help build the knowledge that every child needs to thrive. A couple of years ago, in a low-income dayton, Ohio, fourth-grade teacher named Sarah Webb decided to try out a new content-focused curriculum that her district was considering adopting. The adjustment from a skills focus was not easy, but soon Webb could see that students of all levels of literacy flourished. They wanted to know more about certain topics discussed in the curriculum, so Webb took books out of the public library to satisfy their curiosity. She told me that after the device on What makes a big heart? a girl talked about plasma all year round. That's how Webb had always wanted to teach, but she had never been able to make it happen. Like other teachers I've spoken to, she said that children who were previously considered low achieves were particularly excited. She remembers a cute boy I'm going to call Matt, who had a history of reading difficulties. As the year went on, themselves interested in everything the class studied and became the leader in class discussions. He wrote a whole paragraph about Clara Barton—more than he had ever written before—that he proudly read to his parents. His mother said she had never seen him so excited about school. Before, says Webb, Matt felt permanently conferred on what kids see as the stupid group. But at the end of the year, he wrote Webb a thank you letter. When he read, he said to her, There was no fight anymore. This article was adapted from Natalie Wexler's book The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System – And How to Fix It. It appears in the August 2019 issue headlined The Radical Case for Teaching Kids Stuff. Things.