

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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The “GIST” of the reading comprehension problem in grades 4 and 5

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Main idea and summary are essential elements of reading comprehension. We report results from Grades 4 and 5 student performance on two years of state-mandated standardized reading testing which indicate that students perform statistically significantly lower on main idea and summary questions on the tests than any other question category. In this study, teacher competency was measured in a main idea task and teacher surveys were used to understand what instructional practices and materials they use to teach reading comprehension. Descriptive analyses indicate that teachers have a moderate competency for writing main ideas and many use instructional practices that are not supported by empirical evidence or reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. Thus, teacher knowledge and instructional practices may be malleable factors that contribute to student outcomes.

KEYWORDS

gist, main idea, state assessments, summary, teacher knowledge