

# Assessing Teacher Beliefs about Early Literacy Curriculum Implementation

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# Assessing Teacher Beliefs about Early Literacy Curriculum Implementation

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# Background

- Literacy begins long before school entry and involves synergistic development of listening, speaking, reading, writing (Clay, 1966)
- Children play active roles in their own development, (Bruner, 1983; Piaget, 1952; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1962)
- Language learning is driven by and dependent on the capacity to understand and participate in social situations (Macnamara, 1972)

# Early Literacy

- (American) National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) identified numerous early literacy skills that have predictive relationships with later measures of literacy (NELP, 2008).
- The NELP, like the National Reading Panel Report, may lead to policies that inadvertently narrow the curriculum (Pearson & Hiebert, 2010).
  - Policies may over-emphasize constrained skills (e.g., alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness) that promote early decoding rather than on abilities, such as oral language, that support conceptual development and reading comprehension.

What, if any, kind of actions can/should be taken to (re)broaden the potentially narrowing view of what early literacy among various stakeholders?

- Take stock of how practitioners view early literacy, how their views translate into classroom practices, and how competent they feel with regard to how they foster early literacy.
- The aim of this study is to design and validate an instrument that captures teacher beliefs, practices and competencies with regard to early literacy.

By understanding teachers' beliefs and practices, teacher educators, coaches, and researchers may be better able to...

1. Help teachers understand and interpret research findings in relation to their own teaching and the needs of their students.
2. Implement professional development that recognizes and respects teachers' beliefs and practices, and suggest instructional practices that teachers find ecologically valid.
3. Conduct research in collaboration with teachers.

# Teacher Beliefs about Curriculum Implementation - Early Literacy (TBCI-EL)

Three strands of early literacy content goals:

- **Book Handling and Understanding**

- Demonstrates book handling skills
- Understands directionality
- Identifies some aspects of story structure

- **Functional Reading and Writing**

- Understands that there is a relationship between written and spoken words
- Understands communicative purposes of different written products
- Writes in ways that approximate conventional writing

- **Decoding**

- Understands simple alliteration
- Understands that spoken words are made up of phonemes
- Provides the names of some letters
- Provides the sounds that letters represent
- Reading their own name

# The TBCI-EL asks teachers for...

- Examples of how to *ideally* teach an educational objective
- The frequency with which the teacher implements that particular instructional practice
- The teachers' knowledge and ability to provide instruction related to each objective
- Further, teachers are asked to rank order each educational objective within each of the strands, and then to rank order the three strands.



# Research Questions

- To what extent is the TBCI-EL a valid, reliable and practical instrument for capturing teacher beliefs, practices and competencies with regard to early literacy in 4-year old classrooms?
  - Phase I: Expert appraisal
    - 3 early literacy experts provided feedback and suggestions for revising and administering
  - Phase II: Piloting
    - Instrument used with 20 teachers of 4 year olds

# Participants

- 13 teachers from The Netherlands
  - Focus group interview (n=6)
  - Individual interviews (n=8)
- 7 teachers from the United States
  - Individual interviews
  - ~ 1 hour to administer

# Results: Content Validity

- Experts approved of core distinctions (3 strands)
- Recommended more precise wording for some elements
- Suggested the addition of more open questions, especially regarding instructional practices

# Results: Face Validity

- Teachers believed that early literacy beliefs were being measured
- The core ideas seemed familiar and understood
- Reflecting on statements was easier for teachers (and with the NL teachers, more enjoyable) than producing examples from their own practice
  - We suspect this is primarily a function of task difficulty, but do not rule out the possibly need to clarify some of the questions
  - Describing “ideal” practices may be too difficult

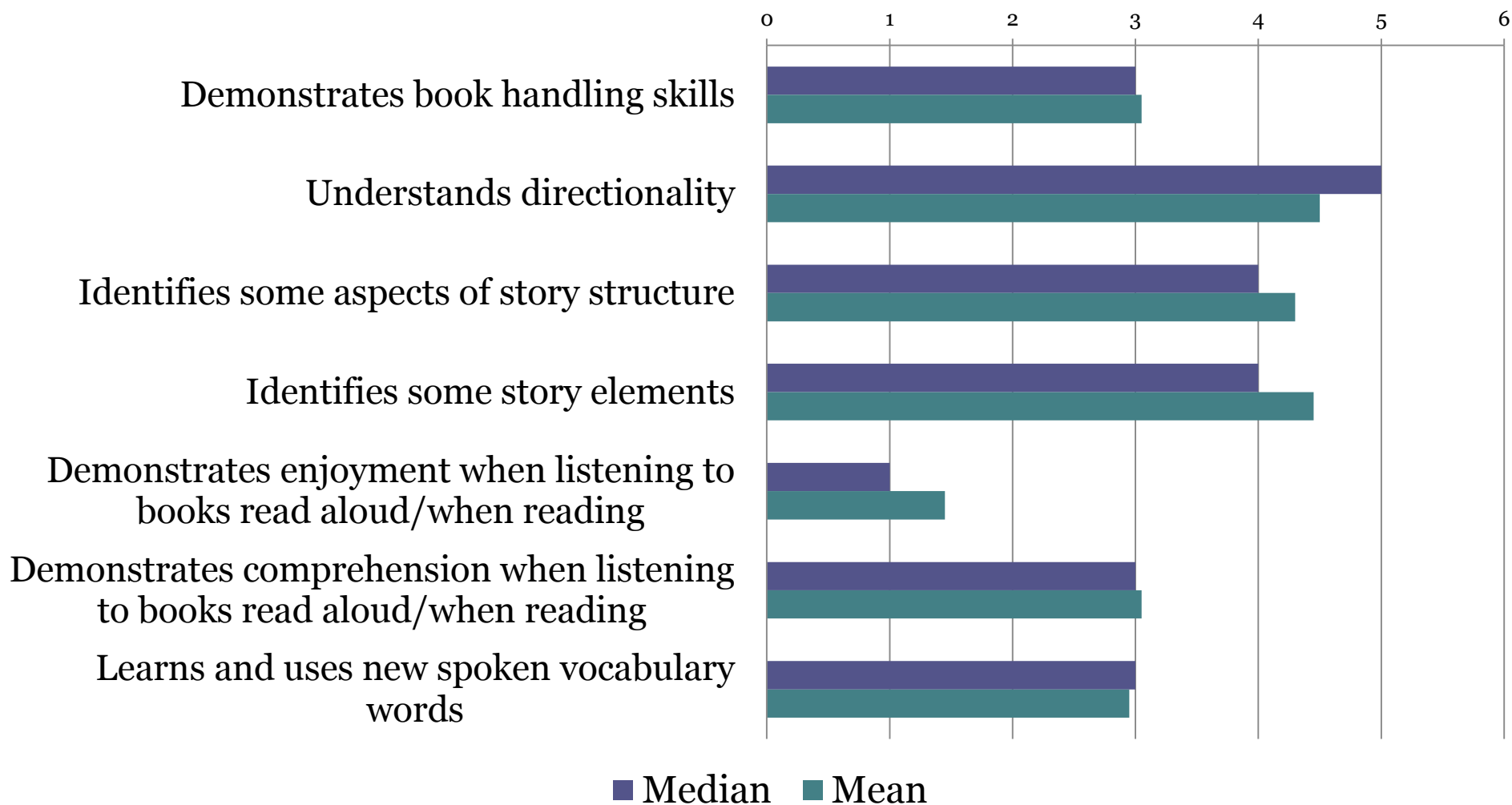
# Results: Practicality

- Performance: One hour, individually worked best, supportive cue card helpful
- Accuracy: Protocol clear, reformatting helped decrease chance for mistakes
- Recall: Required researcher preparation for initial use and refresher if long periods elapsed between uses (> 1 month)
- Emotional response: Teachers were happy to share their thoughts, got more quickly tired in group setting and struggled with 'ideal' practices

# What is early literacy?

- Teachers, particularly in the US, focused on **decoding skills** (e.g., letters, sounds) to prepare child to be successful at reading and writing
- Teachers, particularly in The Netherlands, mention of **book orientation and understanding**
- Few teachers mentioned the understand of **the function of written language**

# Book Orientation and Understanding

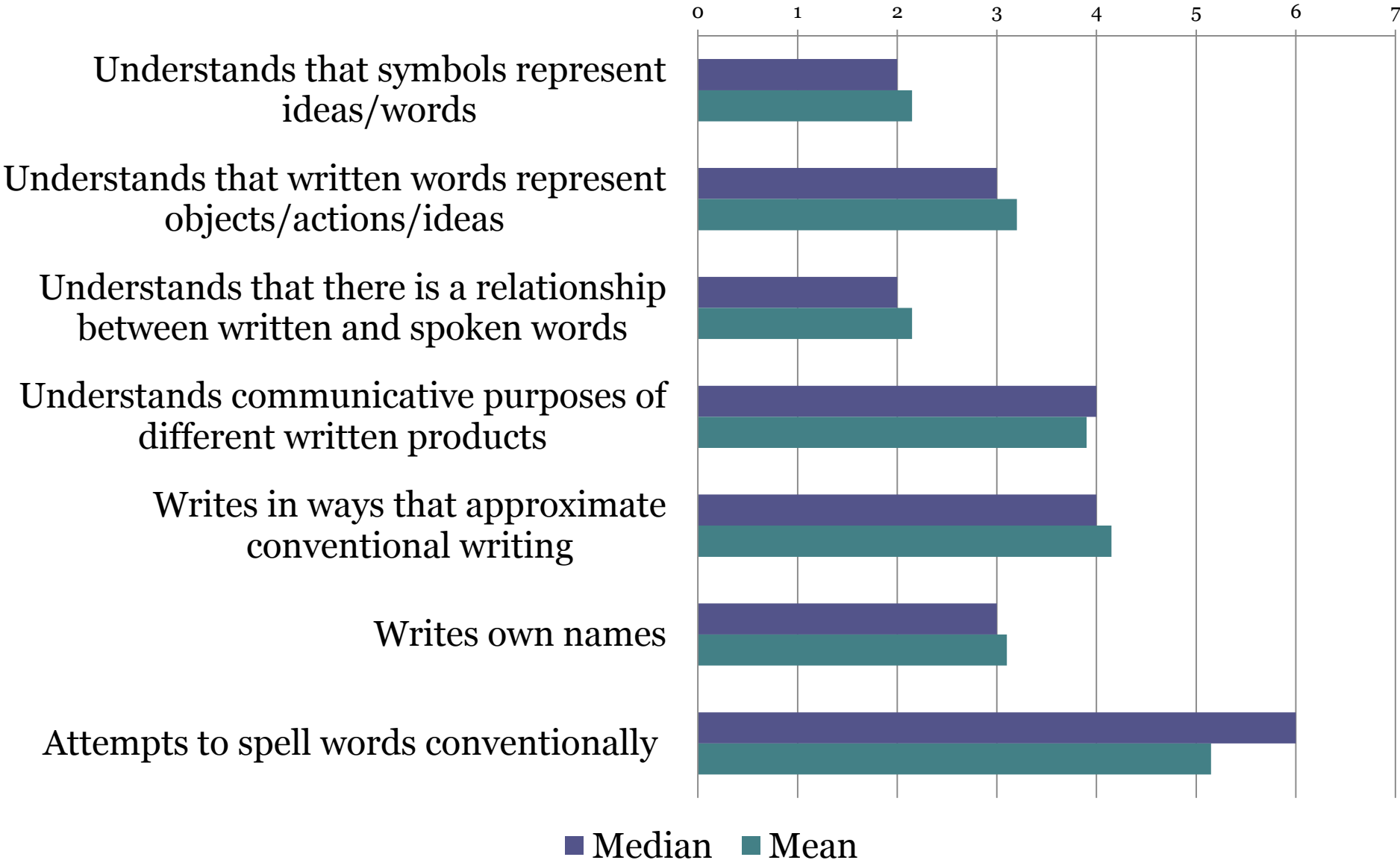


# Ways to Teach **Book Orientation & Understanding**

Book handling	Teacher models book handling; children have opportunities to “read”; classroom ‘rules’ for how to treat books
Directionality	Teacher finger points; children point to text; always write child’s name un the upper left corner of their work
Story Structure	Teacher asks questions; picture card to sequence story; act it out
Story elements	Teacher asks questions; children retell, predict or act out; vertelkastje (story box)
Enjoys reading/ listening	Teacher reads with expression, re-reads books, and models enjoyment
Understands reading/listening	Teacher asks questions; children act out story; children re-tell stories
Vocabulary	Teacher defines new words; children point to picture or act out; “telling table” with artifacts related to classroom themes



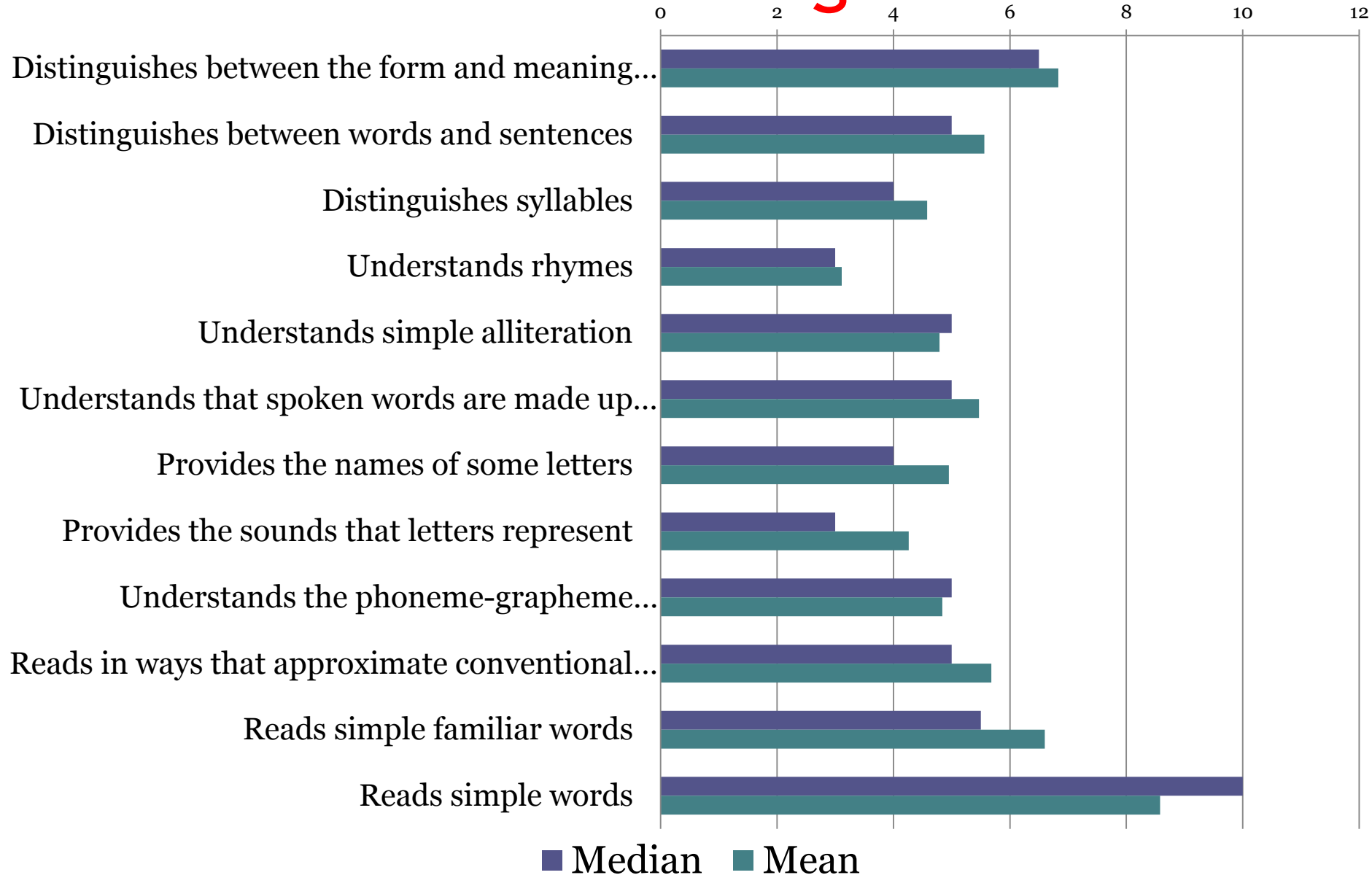
# Functional Reading and Writing



# Ways to Teach Functional Reading and Writing

Symbols represent ideas/words	Environmental print available; using image-based daily rhythm cards (these show main events: circle time, snack, outdoor play)
Written words represent objects/actions/ideas	Tell children we read words, not pictures; write in front of children; send letters home with children
Relationship between written-spoken words	Dictation or writing in front of children; children's name tags; labeled environment
Communicative purposes of written products	Variety of printed materials and opportunities to use or make; using written products in (dramatic) play
Approximates conventional writing	Handwriting without Tears program, trace/copy/write their own names; pre-writing practice skills
Writes own name	Copy/trace/write their names or first letter; daily sign-in; demonstration
Attempts to spell words conventionally	Invented spelling based on letter-sound correspondences; <i>(many teachers said they did not work on this yet)</i>

# Decoding



# Ways to Teach **Decoding**

Functional reading and writing	Match words and pictures; write words and show the size of them
Distinguishes between words and sentences	Point to words; talk about spaces; count words when writing; games (e.g. when you hear 'ball', stand up)
Distinguishes syllables	Clap and/or count syllables in words
Understands rhymes	Help children notice, identify and generate rhymes by using books, nursery rhymes, songs, and picture/objects that rhyme
Understands simple alliteration	Use books, songs, poems with alliteration, encourage children to notice the first letter
Understands that spoken words are made up of phonemes	Manipulatives and words – to say each letter name and sound

# Ways to Teach **Decoding** cont.

Provides the names of some letters	Teach letters in children's names, teach letters daily/weekly, ABC games; letter wall
Provides sounds that letters represent	Teach letters daily; games; flash cards; letter wall
Understands phoneme-grapheme connection	Pretend writing or children writing their names; sounding out simple words
Reads in ways that approximate conventional reading	Teacher models reading and finger pointing; reading corner; reading to doll or other child
Reads simple familiar words	Children Recognize or reads their own name ( <i>many teachers indicated this was not a goal they had at this age</i> )
Reads simple words	Label room; practice making words with letter titles ( <i>many teachers indicated this was not a goal they had at this age</i> )

# Materials and Technology to Teach

- **Materials**

- **Book Orientation and Understanding:** Books, books on CDs, story cards, felt board stories, puppets, writing materials
- **Functional Reading and Writing:** Books, word cards, writing materials, *Handwriting without Tears*
- **Decoding:** Books, name cards/flash cards, board games and rhyming tubs, *Handwriting Without Tears*

- **Technology**

- **Book Orientation and Understanding:** CDs, tapes, computers – read books, interactive games, TV/videos, document camera
- **Functional Reading and Writing:** Computers – interactive websites/games, CDs, document camera
- **Decoding:** Computer games, CDs, TV/videos

# Thoughts about Instruction

- Instruction tended to be teacher directed with modeling, demonstrating, questioning, reading...
  - Children watching or responding to questions, imitating, pointing, retelling, tracing/copying/writing (name), clapping
- Some playful activities: dramatic play center, acting out stories, interactive computer games, some board games, some child/class-made literacy artifacts
- What is/what happened to the role of play and exploration in literacy learning?

# Conclusion & Future Directions

- The concepts resonated with teachers, but....
  - teachers had difficulty with 'ideal' practices
  - planning for these goals was not as familiar
    - Storybook: seemed less planned but more natural
    - Functions: teachers seemed to struggle most with these
    - Decoding: distinctions between goals were more some challenging
- Decoding seems to be prioritized above other goals
- Examine discriminant validity using larger sample
- Examine content validity more systematically e.g. Lawshe's content validity ratio