## CHAPTER ONE

# Unifying Theory, Research, and Practice



### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How do we define comprehension?
- How well does the Simple View of Reading explain reading comprehension across the developmental continuum?
- How do theoretical models of reading contribute to our understanding of comprehension?
- Based on the most recent research, what essential elements must receive attention in the creation of an all-inclusive comprehension curriculum for students in the intermediate grades?

How do you define comprehension? How would your mother define reading comprehension? Most people base their perception of comprehension on their school experiences. As teachers, our definition of comprehension is likely to be influenced by the decade in which we attended our most recent teacher training on reading comprehension. Our understanding of what comprehension is and how best to tackle it in classrooms has changed across the decades as research has expanded and we learn more. In any scientific process, our understanding increases over time as the ongoing accumulation of knowledge provides new information and insights.

In this chapter, we will address how and why our conception of comprehension has changed over time. We will share some of the historical influences that have shaped our definition of comprehension and resulting classroom practices. Then we will describe a few theories that explain factors that influence readers' comprehension of what they are reading. Finally, we will establish some principles that summarize how the theories and research will inform the recommendations that we make throughout this book.

## THE EVOLUTION OF COMPREHENSION'S DEFINITION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON INSTRUCTION

Durkin's (1978) pivotal classroom observation study revealed that many teachers used postreading questions as their primary way to address reading comprehension. In that era, teachers and tests required children to respond to mostly literal questions as evidence of understanding explicitly stated information in the text. However, both teachers and researchers knew less about explicitly teaching students to engage in strategies that contribute to understanding.

In 1976, the U.S. Department of Education funded the Center for the Study of Reading to address the large number of children failing to read successfully. During this era, researchers produced a large body of work that focused on comprehension and vocabulary instruction, including the seminal work that supported explicit strategy instruction and related protocols for teaching comprehension strategies. Cognitive science dominated comprehension research in the late 1970s through the 1980s. We learned the importance of employing *declarative* (what it is), *procedural* (how to do it), and *conditional* (when and why) knowledge when teaching students to use cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies emphasized during this time period included prediction, visualization, text structures, summarization, ideational prominence (main idea), monitoring, and inference generation (Paris et al., 1983). Pearson and Gallagher (1983) published their ubiquitous model of the *gradual release of responsibility* that described the teacher's shift of instructional responsibility to the students during comprehension instruction. The body of work from this era defined comprehension and influenced instruction throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) completed a clearly defined, systematic study of the five pillars of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Although the panel's report recognized that phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary played a role in comprehension, they did not discuss the reciprocity of the pillars. The NRP defined comprehension as *the act of understanding and interpreting the text's message.* The majority of the comprehension research studies reviewed by the NRP focused on comprehension instruction in the intermediate grades.

In 2002, the RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) reported its findings on what research and instruction were needed to improve reading comprehension achievement in the United States. They defined *comprehension* as the "process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RRSG, 2002, p. 11). Their report included a heuristic that centered on the interactions between the reader, the text, and the literacy activities within a sociocultural context that influences and is influenced by those interactions. This model represented an agreed-upon shift in the field from

viewing the reader as a recipient of the author's ideas to viewing the reader as an active co-constructor of the text's meaning.

Policies have also influenced our definition of comprehension. The introduction and implementation of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS) or similar state modifications shaped the perception of comprehension in many ways (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010). First, CCSS prioritized comprehension standards in the primary grades that called for teachers to spend instructional time on and give attention to high-level comprehension of complex texts with young children. Additionally, the CCSS focused on integrating reading, writing, and speaking with various multidisciplinary texts. (See Appendix A.)

The introduction of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS; Next Generation Science Standards Lead States, 2013) and the C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards (C3SSS; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013) forced teachers to instruct elementary students to address the challenges encountered when reading to learn something unknown. The disciplines of literacy, science, social studies, and math each have their own Discourse and criteria for building knowledge and communication of that knowledge (see Chapter 3). Elementary teachers had to think about comprehension from a disciplinary expert's perspective. Disciplinary experts in secondary education began learning the nuances of the reading comprehension and writing demands unique to their discipline. An educator's definition of comprehension is never in stasis.



## CURRENT INFLUENCES

From 2011 to 2016, the U.S. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded the Reading for Understanding (RfU) research initiative. IES selected six research teams to examine the process of comprehension, identify the targets for effective comprehension interventions, and develop and test interventions intended to improve reading comprehension for prekindergarten (PreK) through grade 12. "The ultimate goal defined in the [IES] call was to redress the disappointing performance of students in the United States on national assessments of reading" (Pearson et al., 2020, p. 12). IES also funded a committee of independent scholars and representatives from each research team to synthesize the outcomes of over 200 studies conducted by the five university research teams and the Educational Testing Service (see Pearson et al., 2020). The synthesis committee divided the studies' contributions into three categories: (1) nature and development of comprehension, (2) assessment, and (3) curriculum and instruction.

These studies confirmed that developmental differences influence variability in contributions to comprehension. However, over time comprehension monitoring

and inferencing consistently make the most significant cognitive contributions to reading comprehension. Both word and world knowledge support readers' abilities to monitor and infer. In addition to declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, the committee concluded that reading comprehension instruction must incorporate disciplinary knowledge and epistemic knowledge (how knowledge is generated and evaluated within a discipline). From the earliest grades through high school, *learning to read* and *reading to learn* have a complementary relationship and must coexist. In their concluding comments, Pearson and colleagues (2020) determined that this extensive body of research provided a glimpse at an alternative culture of comprehension in which "the job of comprehension is not complete until one uses the resulting understanding to do something—tell a story, explain a situation, argue with an author or a classmate or maybe even plan to change the world" (p. 286). The next generation of curricula and assessments will likely incorporate the findings from this research and the updated comprehension construct.

## THE SIMPLE VIEW OF READING

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) is a theory that has been widely applied in research and practice since its development (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). The developers of the CCSS and related curricula materials used it to guide their work (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). Several of the RfU research teams used the SVR to underpin their studies while directly investigating the nuances of the theory's components. The SVR states that Decoding/Word Recognition × Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension. In a recent paper discussing this theory, Hoover and Tunmer (2018) defined *decoding* as the automatic recognition of written words "to efficiently gain access to the appropriate word meanings contained in the internal mental lexicon," *language comprehension* as "the ability to extract and construct literal and inferred meaning from linguistic discourse represented in speech," and *reading comprehension* as the ability "to extract and construct literal and inferred meaning from linguistic discourse represented in print" (p. 304).

The RfU studies validated the SVR application in the lower grades, with cautions for basing curricula or assessments on it. Lonigan and Burgess (2017) determined that reading comprehension is not measurable separately from decoding until grade 3 or until readers achieve a decoding threshold.

However, the RfU studies and several other studies have found many limitations in applying the SVR beyond early reading. When studies require readers to engage with more complex tasks and texts, the simple theory fails to explain the process (e.g., Paris & Hamilton, 2009; Snow, 2018). When we look at how the definition and expectations for reading comprehension have changed over time, it is easy to see that both today's definition of reading comprehension and the construct of

reading comprehension are more complex than the expectations were in the 1980s. In the intermediate grades and beyond, comprehension is no longer simple. The SVR does not account for the strategic processing, critical evaluation, or application that are requisite aspects of reading comprehension (Pearson et al., 2020; Snow, 2018; Stahl et al., 2020). In light of the failings of the SVR to account for the complexities of reading in the intermediate grades and beyond, we will rely more on other theories that account for the multidimensional aspects of comprehension at this stage of development.

## READING DEVELOPMENT

### Chall's Stages of Reading

Chall's (1996) model of overall reading development includes six stages, each of which emphasizes a different aspect of the reading process (see Table 1.1). However, it is noteworthy that Chall's detailed descriptions of each stage demonstrate that she never intended for each stage to have a singular focus. For example, during the confirmation and fluency stage, instruction should also address a continuation of systematic word recognition competencies, conceptual vocabulary development, and comprehension instruction. Additionally, at all stages of development, we want students to interact with compelling texts with appropriate levels of support.

Other researchers recommended that the boundaries between stages should be viewed more as overlapping, fluid waves than as rigid boundaries. Significantly, the idea that "learning to read" and "reading to learn" occur in different grade levels is no longer applicable. The RfU research studies confirmed that our youngest students could and should be learning from texts as they learn how to read. Additionally, older students also have new things they must learn about reading disciplinary texts, which contain unique grammatical structures, organizational characteristics, and text features.

### Constrained Skills Theory

Unlike Chall's model that looks at readers' typical reading characteristics throughout their schooling and beyond, Paris (2005) looked at the interactions of skill sets as they develop over time and their impact on the reading process. In his constrained skills theory, Paris proposed a continuum of skills ranging from high to low levels of constraint, as shown in Table 1.2. Highly constrained skills include concepts of print, letter knowledge, and phonics because they each include a limited set of items that can be taught to mastery. Additionally, there is only a short span of time when there is a range of age-level performance on a specific constrained skill. For example, children in PreK and kindergarten will vary in the number of letters they can name. However, by the end of first grade, all children typically know all the

**TABLE 1.1. Jeanne Chall's Model of the Stages of Reading Development**

| Stage | Name | What child is learning | Typical activities | Materials |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Stage 0:* Birth to grade 1 | Emergent literacy | Functions of written language, alphabet, phonemic awareness | Story reading, "pseudoreading," alphabet activities, rhyming, nursery rhymes, invented spelling | Books (including predictable stories), letters, writing materials, *Sesame Street* |
| *Stage 1:* Beginning grade 1 | Decoding | Letter–sound correspondences | Teacher-directed reading instruction, phonics instruction | Preprimers and primers, phonics materials, writing materials, trade books |
| *Stage 2:* End of grade 1 to end of grade 3 | Confirmation and fluency | Automatic word recognition, use of context | Reading narratives, generally about known topics | Basal readers, trade books, workbooks |
| *Stage 3:* Grades 4–8 | Learning the new (single viewpoint) | How to learn from text, vocabulary knowledge, strategies | Reading and studying content-area materials, use of encyclopedias, strategy instruction | Basal readers, novels, encyclopedias, textbooks in content areas |
| *Stage 4:* High school and early college | Multiple viewpoints | Reconciling different views | Critical reading, discourse synthesis, report writing | Texts containing multiple views, encyclopedias and other reference materials, magazines and journals, nonfiction books, etc. |
| *Stage 5:* Late college and graduate school | A worldview | Developing a well-rounded view of the world | Learning what not to read as well as what to read | Professional materials |

*Note*. From Stahl et al. (2020). Copyright © 2020 The Guilford Press. Reprinted by permission.



letter names. There also is interdependence between constrained skills such as the ability to learn letters and phonics. Lastly, mastery of constrained skills can be demonstrated uniformly by those who have acquired the skill.

Phonological awareness and fluency are moderately constrained. The duration of development spans multiple years for each skill. After a plateau of expertise, there may still be variation in a reader's fluency that is responsive to the purpose of reading or text content. Individual differences in highly and moderately constrained skills only exist for a short period, and they tend to be codependent. For example, phonological awareness skills and phonics skills tend to develop linearly and in tandem. These abilities are codependent. However, these constrained abilities have little to do with wider curricular and subject-area knowledge. Knowledge of the world does not contribute to a child's ability to learn the vowel–consonant (VC) phonogram pattern, nor does reading ability or spelling VC words contribute to their expertise in any outside areas.

**TABLE 1.2. Dimensions of Constrained or Unconstrained Skills**

| | Constrained | Unconstrained |
|---|---|---|
| Scope | Constrained or set number of items to be learned (e.g., alphabet) | Unlimited |
| Importance | Small set of central important features need to be learned (e.g., word boundaries; period at the end of a sentence) | Not local and varies by context and text (e.g., strategies should be used flexibly) |
| Range of influence | One skill or skill set is narrowly tied to the knowledge of other skills for a short period of time (e.g., reading and spelling the vowel-consonant pattern) | Knowledge in one area has a wide influence on other competencies (e.g., knowledge of the word *democracy* influences knowledge building and communication) |
| Mastery | Skill is mastered within a relatively short developmental period (e.g., writing one's first name; phonics skills) | Competency is acquired incrementally across a lifetime (e.g., world knowledge developed over time influences one's understanding of text) |
| Universality | Once mastered there is little variance among individuals (e.g., letter-sound relationships) | Competence varies within and across individuals dependent upon context and texts (e.g., individual life experiences influence one's understanding of text) |
| Codependence | Linear development makes one skill depend on another (e.g., spelling depends on the ability to segment words) | When a threshold of mastery is achieved in one skill, codependency and correlations are minimized (e.g., fluency's influence on understanding diminishes once a threshold has been achieved) |



Comprehension and vocabulary development are unconstrained and multidimensional skills. Unlike constrained skills, comprehension and vocabulary develop incrementally over a person's lifetime and there are no unitary indicators of mastery. There are always more word meanings to learn and a range of challenging texts to explore. It is more difficult to teach and test unconstrained skills, such as comprehension and vocabulary, compared to constrained skills because of the variation in factors that affect individuals' development of unconstrained skills: the sociocultural milieu in which individuals are raised and live, the instructional contexts, individual student differences, and the texts they read. Additionally, the world knowledge that readers acquire influences their ease of reading, their abilities to make inferences, and their interest in reading. Reciprocally, variations in reading quantity influence knowledge building and vocabulary development.

The differences in constrained and unconstrained skills have implications for curriculum development, instruction, and assessment. Most importantly, although individuals need phonics and fluency to read texts, comprehension and vocabulary must also be a priority in PreK–grade 2 (see Stahl & García, 2015). The language and experiential opportunities that occur in the earliest years of children's lives

contribute to their ability to understand texts and communicate those understandings to others. Today we know that comprehension instruction is more effective when it is combined with authentic knowledge building about the human condition or the world around us (Pearson et al., 2020). Due to the multifaceted nature of unconstrained skills, our instruction and assessment must incorporate opportunities for children to demonstrate their comprehension development by speaking, writing, and completing activities in response to many kinds of reading materials, including new technologies.

### The Role of Pulse Points in Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is never all or nothing. Each reader's quantitative and qualitative comprehension of a text varies by individual. Even as "expert" readers, we can all think of a reading task that challenged us. What made the task challenging for you cognitively or affectively? What strategies or coping techniques did you use? Was your difficulty related to understanding the text or communicating your understanding? How did your understanding differ from someone else's reading experience? Why? There are two critical takeaways from this exercise. First, despite the level of difficulty, you were likely to have understood something from what you read. Additionally, gauging your success depended on achieving some purpose, usually resulting in some form of response. This is the nature of comprehension for our students and for us.

The foundational early reading skills of phonics and fluency are necessary but not sufficient for reading comprehension as we move into the intermediate grades and beyond. We support the position of Paris (2005) and others (Paris & Hamilton, 2009; Pearson et al., 2020; Snow, 2018) that as readers achieve a decoding or fluency threshold, and texts and tasks become more complex and varied, the role of constrained skills diminishes. Due to the traits that define constrained skills, they can only be used to predict overall reading achievement for a short window of time. This premise contradicts the SVR. While reading comprehension is dependent on a threshold of competency in automatic word recognition, once a reader meets a fluency threshold, contextual, text, and individual factors contribute more to understanding (O'Connor et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2019). Contextual factors include things such as the level of instructional support and response format required. Text factors include text density, genre, organizational structure, and text features. Individual factors beyond fluency include prior knowledge, vocabulary, interest, engagement, self-regulation, and working memory (Perfetti & Adlof, 2012).

This concept of contributing pressure points is essential as we consider curricula and pedagogical choices in our classrooms. Both of us have visited classrooms that placed extreme limitations on children's school reading experiences. Children are often only exposed to texts within a narrow reading level identified by an unrehearsed read of a random book from a benchmark test kit or a computer-based test.

While we respect the diagnostic process used to estimate a child's reading level, teachers need to consider the role of pressure points that influence children's reading comprehension development (O'Connor et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2018).

The complexity of reading comprehension and the interaction of multiple pressure points mean that comprehension instruction must provide children with sustained explicit instruction in the application of reading strategies with many texts that vary in difficulty, genre, and medium. The integration of knowledge building while developing comprehension is integral given the role of knowledge in the monitoring and inference generation process. Teaching related vocabulary during the instructional units promotes vocabulary development, comprehension, and the construction of networks of knowledge. Finally, a single assessment cannot capture all the nuances of comprehension. Readers need to have opportunities to express their comprehension through various means, which include but are not limited to oral responses, written responses, collaborative work, and products or projects.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

In our book on the development of comprehension in the early grades (Stahl & García, 2015), we created a model that incorporated the essential elements in an all-inclusive comprehension curriculum for young children. We have modified that model somewhat to incorporate an outer layer of external factors that are likely to influence the inner circles that represent the classroom factors (see Figure 1.1).

### Sociocultural Influences

Although not drawn on top of the figure (to avoid graphic confusion), the sociocultural influences serve as a filter that overlays all school interactions, those within the classroom and outside the classroom. In the most extreme case, we can consider the sociocultural impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Small conversation groups and group projects were difficult to undertake while still maintaining safe social-distancing regulations. Additionally, food scarcity anxiety, economic transitions, and health concerns made it difficult for many children to focus on schoolwork when families dealt with life and death matters.

### Systemic Elements

The outer square elements impact the effectiveness of classroom comprehension instruction positively or negatively. The new field of improvement science (Bryk et al., 2015; LeMahieu et al., 2017) is a problem-solving approach that involves community networks (CN) of experts from various backgrounds working together to solve problems of practice. These CN investigations not only look at classroom

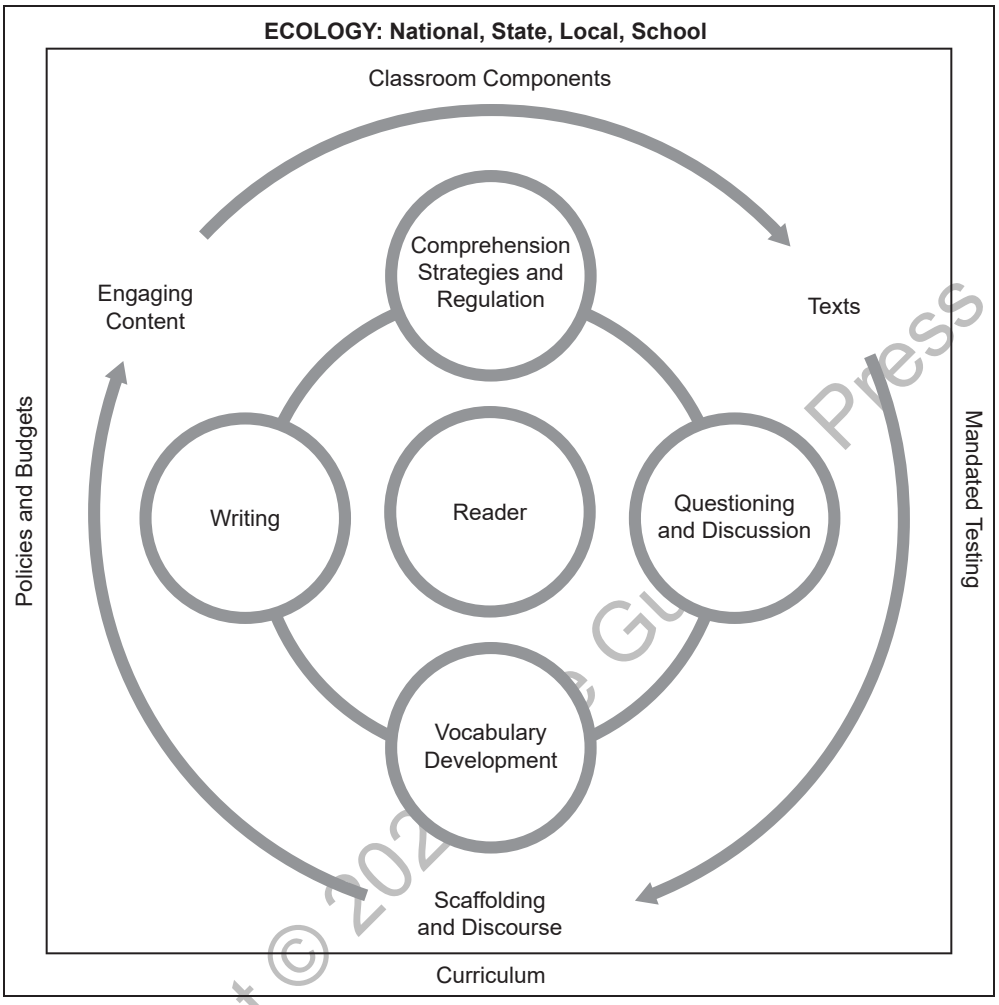


**FIGURE 1.1.** Model of an all-inclusive comprehension curriculum. *Note*. Sociocultural dynamics influence all aspects portrayed in this figure. Adapted from Stahl and García (2015). Copyright © 2015 The Guilford Press. Adapted by permission.



data but also incorporate the influence of systemic factors on school improvement efforts. Our model's outer box includes factors that live outside the classroom, yet they influence the decisions and forces at work in the inner classroom circles.

Government policies at the federal and state levels have a strong influence on school protocols and procedures. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) required every public school to disaggregate annual literacy test data. This policy forced many "successful" schools to recognize that while most of their students performed above average, there were subsets of children (e.g., children in low socioeconomic groups, special education students, or emerging bilingual/multilingual students) whose needs were not being met.

Annual state English language arts tests are designed to demonstrate that schools are meeting their promise to their constituency by ensuring that their students are making the expected yearly achievement progress in the agreed-upon state standards. However, classrooms often lose months of high-quality instructional time preparing for the tests in rote ways with worksheets. In an improvement science analysis, the CN would collect data on these lost hours. The CN might also compare the ways that instruction differed across schools throughout the year.

Finally, each district and each school has a unique ecology. As with any ecology, that means that there is an interdependence within elements and that interaction among these elements impacts the individual elements and results in the creation of a unique environment. Teachers who have taught at multiple schools can attest to these differences and their influence on classrooms. Ecological differences influence budget allocations, professional development, teacher decision-making independence, and curricular decisions. Therefore, even if a standard curriculum is selected, the teachers often implement the instruction differently from district to district, school to school, and classroom to classroom in a single school.

## Classroom Context Elements

In the outermost circle, we consider elements that serve as the contextual frame for all comprehension activities. We present a brief overview here and cover each element more deeply in its own chapter.

### *Content and Texts*

Historically, rich content has taken a backseat to isolated literacy skills in the intermediate grades. Most longstanding publishers of basal reading programs built units around a single thematic topic, such as persistence or courage. However, these themes often served as catchalls for texts and learning targets that were only loosely related. There was no systematic attempt to build either a body of related knowledge or enough sustained practice in specific comprehension targets to help students gain control over comprehension strategies (Dewitz et al., 2009; Piloneata, 2010).

Since the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010), several core reading programs have made efforts to construct units of study that include connections between reading and writing skills. These units are often related to common grade-level disciplinary topics. For example, the third-grade Expeditionary Learning curriculum includes the units Adaptations and the Wide World of Frogs, A Study of Peter Pan, and Wolves: Fact and Fiction. Despite the efforts to balance informational and narrative text reading and narrative, informational, and argumentative writing, the units were constructed with a humanities lens. For example, the frog and wolf units' final assessments call for the students to compose narratives about each topic. At the conclusion of the Peter Pan unit, the children engage in "opinion writing about a new character." Literacy skills trump disciplinary knowledge building in these units.

Rather than building units that provide a range of reading materials designed to help students acquire disciplinary knowledge, these publishers created a balance of informational and narrative texts on a given topic with loose learning goals related to the science topics, not disciplinary learning standards. Publishers and teachers often fear that teaching knowledge during the literacy block will compromise the students' acquisition of grade-level literacy standards (Connor et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2009). Disciplinary experts worry that integrated units dilute or misrepresent content knowledge (see Chapter 3).

Calkins (2017) approaches the balance of narrative and informational text similarly in her popular reading and writing units of study. Her third-grade reading materials include four narrative units, two expository units, and a poetry unit (Calkins, 2015). Although the interactive teacher read-aloud involves the whole class, all the children read different texts. In this instructional model, the children's independent reading level and personal interests inform their text selection. Therefore, there is no connection to community knowledge building that comes from reading and collaborating. Additionally, there is little to no connection to state-mandated disciplinary standards. The informational writing lessons adhere more closely to literary ideals than teaching and providing practice in helping children use disciplinary standards for informational and argumentative writing.

Researchers recently confirmed that word and world knowledge are essential for comprehension (Pearson et al., 2020). Vocabulary development and word recognition facilitate each other. The collection of studies conducted as part of the RfU initiative indicated that reading comprehension should be integrated within content-area learning and exploration even before children can read independently (*www.ets.org/research/report/retooling-literacy/part2b*). By third grade, comprehension instruction should directly address strategic processing, thinking, and reasoning. Multicomponent instruction that focuses on multiple strategies rather than specific skills is most effective.

Additionally, the environment should be language rich and include discussion, debate, and collaborative activities. Discipline-specific writing that responds to text and communicates thinking should be an integral part of instructional units. The research results in third grade and beyond suggest that integrating reading and content instruction can boost learning in both areas rather than sacrificing either (Connor et al., 2017; Romance & Vitale, 1992, 2017). If we do not teach children how to learn from reading, we resort to reading to them, using PowerPoints, or teaching by telling (Pearson et al., 2020, p. 222). (See Chapter 3.)

Balancing the quantity of informational and narrative text should not be the driving force in text selection within a unit of study or across a year. That balance should be an effect of the curriculum. When units of study are constructed across the year to address essential learning in literary, science, and social studies content, the effect is a collection of texts that vary in genre, readability levels, text type, and media format.

The authentic, purposeful learning about meaningful topics in interactive, collaborative settings promotes student curiosity and engagement. This level of student interaction and agency yields motivation and increased engagement. The Educational Testing Service summary of the RfU curriculum recommendations calls for teachers to foster and monitor positive reading dispositions that go beyond the simplistic "joy of reading" (*www.ets.org/research/report/retooling-literacy/part2b*). In our experience, we observed children whose authentic classroom explorations led them to delight, fulfillment, and a yearning to dig more deeply into classroom topics. In this book, we hope that our recommendations might create that level of excitement for teachers and their students.

### *Scaffolding and Discourse*

In the 1970s, most intermediate classrooms only allocated time for a brief prereading introduction to a story, time for students to silently read the story, followed by an IRE (initiate–response–evaluate) discussion format. Teachers explicitly taught skills such as identifying the main idea, and students practiced the skills in workbooks throughout the week. The following week the class moved to a different set of skills. Today we know that students need sustained practice using a range of materials and various activities to acquire the skills and strategies necessary to understand the text. Equally important, students need to learn how to express their comprehension verbally, in speech and writing. These competencies take a great deal of time compared to the efficiency of teaching constrained skills.

History has affirmed the effectiveness of using the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) to teach comprehension and writing processes (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Therefore, teachers need time to walk through the phases that shift the responsibility to the students. Explicit teaching should be direct and precise. However, the modeling often requires the examination and creation of multiple examples, particularly in writing. The more knowledgeable other must provide focused attention and feedback during guided practice, not just a walk-by. Suppose we shortchange these steps or neglect to move back and forth along the continuum during the learning process. In that case, we risk creating learners who cannot transfer the skills when they are asked to apply them independently in novel experiences. All classroom teachers have had the experience of scratching their heads and saying, "Why can't they do this? I taught it to them two weeks ago." Rushing through the GRR or skipping steps is one possible answer. Often reading programs do not allocate the time needed to teach processes thoroughly before moving on to a new target.

Language development contributes to both listening and reading comprehension in significant ways. Chapter 2 addresses the unique needs of our students from diverse backgrounds. Our classrooms need to accept, nurture, and expand multiple forms of discourse ranging from social to academic. Gee (1990) distinguishes

between discourse (language in use) and Discourse (with a capital *D*). According to Gee, Discourse is a particular way of using language that reflects a way of thinking, feeling, and valuing. It identifies one as being an insider within a specific social network. The Discourse that we use in our spiritual community is probably different from the Discourse we use at our employment place. What is newly relevant for most children in the intermediate grades is the Discourse shifts required when engaging in their academic assignments. The Discourse for each disciplinary area is unique. The Discourse used when one reads, writes, discusses, or critiques literary text is not the same Discourse that one would employ with social studies or science texts (Goldman, Britt, et al., 2016; Stahl, 2014). By integrating disciplinary learning with literacy, we provide the opportunity for our students to use the Discourse of the academic community and build knowledge in authentic ways.

## Instructional Elements

### *Comprehension Strategies and Regulation*

In the intermediate grades, teaching cognitive comprehension strategies is among the top priorities. Any curriculum for grades 3–6 should include thorough instruction of the declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of purposeful predictions, utilization of relevant prior knowledge, visualization, text structure, ideational prominence (level of importance), summarization, questioning, inference generation, and monitoring. The RfU studies indicate that the ability to generate inferences and conduct self-monitoring makes the most substantive contribution to comprehension. Therefore, teachers should emphasize them across all grade levels.

Additionally, we know that although each strategy should be explicitly taught in isolation, they need to be applied as quickly as possible within routines that employ multiple strategies. Instructional programs, such as reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) or transactional strategy instruction (Pressley et al., 1992), can be helpful. However, the goal of strategy instruction is for readers to use strategies flexibly, as needed, to overcome meaning-making hurdles (see Chapter 6).

### *Questioning and Discussion*

Classroom discussion plays a crucial role in comprehension instruction. The value of teacher-led discussions goes well beyond the goals of checking for understanding. Teachers often provide the bridge that moves the students' thinking to higher levels. Teachers also serve as powerful Discourse models for how we think and talk about texts associated with each discipline. Teaching students to ask the questions that literary critics, scientists, and historians ask paves the way for student-led conversations and knowledge building in each discipline. Classroom talk might also be

more likely to take the form of book clubs, debate teams, video performances, and research teams than it has in the past. These formats encourage active learning, student agency, student engagement, and joy (see Chapter 7).

### *Vocabulary Development*

Comprehension of any text is dependent on knowledge of the vocabulary in the text. Therefore, if teachers expect their students to understand the texts they will be reading, instructional provisions must be made to address their students' vocabulary needs. In the intermediate grades, students have always encountered increasing volumes of academic vocabulary due to the emphasis on reading to learn new content. One of the benefits of teaching comprehension within disciplinary units is that the hands-on experiences and networks of knowledge needed to understand academic vocabulary are built into the unit of study. Additionally, the students have sustained opportunities to hear and say the words during learning experiences, read the words in multiple texts, and use them in their writing. Multiple exposures, especially multimodal activities, create a greater likelihood of word learning for all students (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986; Wright & Cervetti, 2016). (See Chapter 5.)

### *Writing*

Like speaking, writing helps readers solidify and expand their understanding of what they have read, mainly when synthesizing information or putting together ideas from multiple sources. Equally important, writing is a way for students to communicate what they have comprehended. Whether sending a chat message to get assistance on the Verizon website, responding to a note from a teacher, or commenting on a blog, composing a written response to something that we read is part of the fabric of everyone's lives. In today's world, many opportunities to talk to service providers have been replaced with online written directives and prompts for us to respond in writing. While writing personal narratives can be therapeutic and expand one's awareness of the human experience, most of the writing that we do in our daily lives responds to what we have read, informs, or argues a position. Our students' literacy learning activities should prepare them for life's demands (see Chapter 8).

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Before reading this book, we encourage you to self-evaluate your current instructional practices by completing Form 1.1 (at the end of the chapter). This is an opportunity for you to consider how your current instructional practices align with

the most recent research findings. Our form provides a means for you to identify your strengths, face your challenges, and pinpoint voids in your curriculum. This process can help you determine a few minor changes that you can make immediately to increase the effectiveness of your instruction. Other changes may require a long-term plan and more sustained, supportive professional development. According to Pearson et al. (2020), high-quality comprehension instruction requires time, patience, persistence, and ideally, a network of support. We urge you to work with your colleagues, school, and district to recruit support for this valuable endeavor.





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