

COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE READING PROCESS**Skill 1.1 Reading as a process of constructing meaning through interaction among the reader, the text, and the context of the reading situation**

First, teachers should realize that historically, there are two broad sides regarding the construction of meaning and the application of strategies. One is behavioral learning. Behavioral learning theory suggests that people learn socially or through some sort of stimulation or repetition. For examples, when we touch a hot stove, we learn not to do that again; or, when we make a social error and are made fun of for it, we learn proper social conventions; or, we learn to produce something by watching someone do the same thing.

The other broad theory is cognitive. Cognitive learning theories suggest that learning takes place in the mind, and that the mind processes ideas through brain mapping and connections with other material and experiences. In other words, with behaviorism, learning is somewhat external. We see something, for example, and then we copy it. With cognitive theories, learning is internal. For example, we see something, analyze it in our minds, and make sense of it for ourselves. Then, if we choose to copy it, we do, but we do so having internalized (or thought about) the process.

Today, even though behavioral theories exist, most educators believe that children learn cognitively. So, for example, when teachers introduce new topics by relating those topics to information students are already familiar with or have been exposed to, they are expecting that students will be able to better integrate new information into their memories by attaching it to something that is already there. Or, when teachers apply new learning to real-world situations, they are expecting that the information will make more sense when it is applied to a real situation.

In all of the examples given in this standard, the importance is the application of new learning to something concrete. In essence, what is going on with these examples is that the teacher is building on knowledge or adding knowledge to what students already know. Cognitively, this makes a great deal of sense. Think of a file cabinet. When we already have files for certain things, it's easy for us to throw new information into them. When we're given something that doesn't fit into one of the pre-existing files, we struggle to know what to do with it. The same is true with human minds.

The point of comprehension instruction is not necessarily to focus just on the text(s) students are using at the very moment of instruction, but rather to help them learn the strategies that they can use independently with any text.

Some of the most common methods of teaching instruction are as follows:

- **Summarization:** This is where, either in writing or verbally, students note the main point of the text, along with strategically chosen details that highlight the main point. This is not the same as paraphrasing, which is saying the same thing in different words. Teaching students how to summarize is very important as it will help them look for the most critical areas in a text, especially in non-fiction. For example, it will help them distinguish between main points and examples. In fiction, it helps students to learn how to focus on the main characters and events and distinguish them from the lesser characters and events.
- **Question answering:** While this tends to be over-used in many classrooms, it is still a valid method of teaching students to comprehend. As the name implies, students answer questions regarding a text, either out loud, in small groups, or individually on paper. The best questions are those that cause students to have to think about the text (rather than just find an answer within the text).
- **Question generating:** This is the opposite of question answering, although students can then be asked to answer their own questions or the questions of peers. In general, we want students to constantly question texts as they read. This is important because it causes students to become more critical readers. Teaching students to generate questions helps them to learn the types of questions they can ask, and it gets them thinking about how best to be critical of texts.
- **Graphic organizers:** Graphic organizers are graphical representations of content within a text. For example, Venn Diagrams can be used to highlight the difference between two characters in a novel or two similar political concepts in a Social Studies textbook. Or, a teacher can use flow-charts with students to talk about the steps in a process (for examples, the steps of setting up a science experiment and the chronological events of a story). Semantic organizers are similar in that they graphically display information. The difference, usually, is that semantic organizers focus on words or concepts. For example, a word web can help students make sense of a word by mapping from the central word all the similar and related concepts to that word.

- Text structure: Often in non-fiction, particularly in textbooks, and sometimes in fiction, text structures will give important clues to readers about what to look for. Often, students do not know how to make sense of all the types of headings in a textbook and do not realize that, for example, the side-bar story about a character in history is not the main text on a particular page in the history textbook. Teaching students how to interpret text structures gives them useful and widely applicable tools.
- Monitoring comprehension: Students need to be aware of their comprehension, or lack of it, in particular texts. So, it is important to teach students what to do when suddenly text stops making sense. For examples, students can go back and re-read the description of a character; and they can go back to the table of contents or the first paragraph of a chapter to see where they are headed.
- Textual marking: This is where students interact with the text as they read. For example, armed with Post-it Notes, students can insert questions or comments regarding specific sentences or paragraphs within the text. This helps students focus on the importance of the small things, particularly when they are reading larger works (such as novels in high school). It also gives students a reference point to the place in the text they need when reviewing something.
- Discussion: Small-group or whole-class discussion stimulates thoughts about texts and gives students a larger picture of the impact of those texts. For example, teachers can strategically encourage students to discuss concepts related to the text. This helps students learn to consider texts within larger societal and social concepts, or teachers can encourage students to provide personal opinions in discussion. By listening to various students' opinions, students in a class get to see the wide range of possible interpretations and thoughts regarding the same text.

Many people mistakenly believe that the terms “research-based” or “research-validated” or “evidence-based” relate mainly to specific programs, such as early reading textbook programs. While research does validate that some of these programs are effective, much research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of particular instructional strategies. In reading, many of these strategies have been documented in the report from the National Reading Panel (2000). However, just because a strategy has not been validated as effective by research does not necessarily mean that it is not effective with certain students in certain situations. The number of strategies out there far outweighs researchers’ ability to test their effectiveness. Some of the strategies listed above have been validated by rigorous research, while others have been shown consistently to help improve students’ reading abilities in localized situations. There simply is not enough space to list all the strategies out there that have been proven effective; just know that the above strategies are very commonly cited ones that work in a variety of situations.

Skill 1.2 Factors that affect reading (e.g., cultural, social, linguistic, developmental, environmental)

Oftentimes, students absorb the culture and social environment around them without deciphering the contextual meaning of the experiences. When provided with a diversity of cultural contexts, students are able to adapt and incorporate multiple meanings from cultural cues vastly different from their own socio-economic backgrounds. Socio-cultural factors impact students’ psychological, emotional, affective, and physiological development, along with their academic learning and future opportunities.

The educational experience for most students is a complicated and complex one with a diversity of interlocking meanings and inferences. If one aspect of the complexity is altered, it affects other aspects. This, in turn, may impact how a student or teacher views an instructional or learning experience. With the current demographic profile of school communities, the complexity of understanding, interpreting, and synthesizing the nuances from the diversity of cultural lineages can result in many communication and learning blockages potentially impeding the acquisition of learning for students.

Teachers must create personalized learning communities where every student is a valued member and contributor of the classroom experiences. In classrooms where socio-cultural attributes of the student population are incorporated into the fabric of the learning process, dynamic interrelationships are created that enhance the learning experience and the personalization of learning. When students are provided with numerous academic and social opportunities to share cultural incorporations in the learning experience, everyone in the classroom benefits by gaining an expanded viewpoint of a world experience and culture that vastly differs from their own.

Researchers continue to show that personalized learning environments increase the learning affect for students; decrease drop-out rates among marginalized students; and decrease unproductive student behavior which can result from constant cultural misunderstandings or miscues between students. Promoting diversity of learning and cultural competency in the classroom for students and teachers creates a world of multicultural opportunities and learning. When students are able to step outside their comfort zones and share the world of a homeless student or empathize with an English Language Learner (ELL) student who has just immigrated to the United States, is learning English for the first time, and is still trying to keep up with the academic learning in an unfamiliar language; then students grow exponentially in social understanding and cultural connectedness.

Personalized learning communities provide supportive learning environments that address the academic and emotional needs of students. As socio-cultural knowledge is conveyed continuously in the interrelated experiences shared cooperatively and collaboratively in student groupings and individualized learning, the current and future benefits will continue to present the case and importance of understanding the “whole” child.

Skill 1.3 The oral language foundation of reading

When students practice fluency, they practice reading connected pieces of text. In other words, instead of looking at a word as just a word, they might read a sentence straight through. The point of this is that in order for students to comprehend what they are reading, they would need to be able to “fluently” piece words in a sentence together quickly. If students are not fluent in reading, they would sound each letter or word out slowly and pay more attention to the phonics of each word. Fluent readers, on the other hand, might read a sentence out loud using appropriate intonations. The best way to test for fluency, in fact, is to have students read something out loud, preferably a few sentences in a row—or more. Sure, most students just learning to read will probably not be very fluent right away; but, with practice, they will increase their fluency. Even though fluency is not the same as comprehension, it is said that fluency is a good predictor of comprehension. Think about it: If you’re focusing too much on sounding out each word, you’re not going to be paying attention to the meaning.

During the preschool years, children acquire cognitive skills in oral language that they apply later on to reading comprehension. Thinking out aloud to young children is one of the most important things that adults can do because they are teaching children how to monitor, question, predict, and confirm what they hear in the stories.) described four metalinguistic abilities that young children acquire through early involvement in reading activities:

1. *Word consciousness.* Children who have access to books first can tell the story through the pictures. Gradually, they begin to realize the connection between the spoken words and the printed words. The beginning of letter and word discrimination begins in the early years.
2. *Language and conventions of print.* During this stage, children learn the way to hold a book, where to begin to read, the left-to-right motion, and how to continue from one line to another.
3. *Functions of print.* Children discover that print can be used for a variety of purposes and functions, including entertainment and information (Reid 1988, p. 165).

The typical variation in literacy backgrounds that children bring to reading can make teaching more difficult. Often teachers have to choose between focusing on the learning needs of a few students at the expense of the group or focusing on the group at the risk of leaving some students behind academically. This situation is particularly critical for children with gaps in their literacy knowledge who may be at risk in subsequent grades of becoming "diverse learners."

Learning approach

Early theories of language development were formulated from learning theory research. The assumption was that language development evolved from learning the rules of language structures and applying them through imitation and reinforcement. This approach also assumed that language, cognitive, and social developments were independent of each other. Thus, children were expected to learn language from patterning after adults who spoke and wrote Standard English. No allowance was made for communication through child jargon, idiomatic expressions, or grammatical and mechanical errors resulting from too strict adherence to the rules of inflection (*childs* instead of *children*) or conjugation (*runned* instead of *ran*). No association was made between physical and operational development and language mastery.

Linguistic approach

Studies spearheaded by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s formulated the theory that language ability is innate and develops through natural human maturation as environmental stimuli trigger acquisition of syntactical structures appropriate to each exposure level. The assumption of a hierarchy of syntax downplayed the significance of semantics. Because of the complexity of syntax and the relative speed with which children acquire language, linguists attributed language development to biological rather than cognitive or social influences.

Cognitive approach

Researchers in the 1970s proposed that language knowledge derives from both syntactic and semantic structures. Drawing on the studies of Piaget and other cognitive learning theorists, supporters of the cognitive approach maintained that children acquire knowledge of linguistic structures after they have acquired the cognitive structures necessary to process language. For example, joining words for specific meaning necessitates sensory motor intelligence. The children must be able to coordinate movement and recognize objects before they can identify words to name the objects or word groups to describe the actions performed with those objects. Children must have developed the mental abilities for organizing concepts, predicting outcomes, and theorizing before they can assimilate and verbalize complex sentence structures, choose vocabulary for particular nuances of meaning, and examine semantic structures for tone and manipulative effect.

Socio-cognitive approach

Other theorists in the 1970s proposed that language development results from socio-linguistic competence. Language, cognitive, and social knowledge are interactive elements of total human development. Emphasis on verbal communication as the medium for language expression resulted in the inclusion of speech activities in most language arts curricula.

Unlike previous approaches, the socio-cognitive allowed that determining the appropriateness of language in given situations for specific listeners is as important as understanding semantic and syntactic structures. By engaging in conversation, children at all stages of development have opportunities to test their language skills, receive feedback, and make modifications. As a social activity, conversation is as structured by social order as grammar is structured by the rules of syntax. Conversation satisfies the learners' need to be heard and understood and to influence others. Thus, their choices of vocabulary, tone, and content are dictated by their ability to assess the language knowledge of their listeners. They are constantly applying their cognitive skills to using language in a social interaction. If the capacity to acquire language is inborn, without an environment in which to practice language, children would not pass beyond the grunts and gestures associated with primitive humans.

Of course, the varying degrees of environmental stimuli to which children are exposed at all age levels create a slower or faster development of language. Some children are prepared to articulate concepts and recognize symbolism by the time they enter fifth grade because they have been exposed to challenging reading and conversations with well-spoken adults at home or in their social groups. Others are still trying to master sight recognition skills and are not yet ready to combine words in complex patterns.

Skill 1.4 The interrelatedness of reading, writing, listening, and speaking

Communication is the process of sharing ideas, information, and knowledge. We construct messages by speaking and writing. We receive messages by listening and reading. Because communication is essentially an interactive process; visual, written, and oral components of language are decidedly interrelated. Each component is interdependent upon the others, while strengthening and supporting them. Children first learn to use oral forms of language (listening and speaking) and then begin to explore and learn the written forms (reading and writing).

Young children's reading and writing skills develop together. Children learn that print provides information and that reading is the process of constructing meaning from written text. Effective readers and writers learn to recognize letters and, consequently, words; begin to learn writing rules; and eventually create meaning from the printed text. However, teachers should know that the process of reading and writing must be fluent, strategic, and continuously developing. Writing enables students to explore, shape, clarify, and ultimately, communicate their thought to others.

Elementary teachers need to understand that oral language (listening and speaking) is used to communicate thoughts, feelings, ideas, and information. Teachers should model effective listening behaviors for students by teaching lessons which instruct students in effective listening practices and behaviors. Students should have multiple opportunities to practice their learned speaking skills through a variety of situations that include conversations, small-group discussions, formal speeches, drama, and storytelling.

An effective language arts program develops a curriculum that integrates each component of reading, writing, listening, and speaking; addressing the reality that all the concepts are overlapping and connecting. The teacher arranges instruction so that students work on developing skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking simultaneously.

- Reading: Reads to establish main idea.
- Writing: Writes the main idea.
- Listening: Listens to determine the main idea.
- Speaking: Clarifies the main idea audibly.

Practicing these concepts simultaneously teaches students how reading, writing listening, and speaking are important learning skills. For example, if the instruction in comprehending the main idea of a story is followed by instruction in writing an informative paragraph that clearly announces the main idea to the readers, the reading and writing connection becomes visible to the students.

Teachers can also reinforce speaking and listening skills by allowing students to give oral reports of their paragraphs,.

Teachers need to be sensitive to the developmental level of students. By recognizing what level students are operating at as language learners, teachers can then provide effective instruction and developmental experiences. Teachers need to be aware of factors involved in children's oral language development including; cognitive maturity, experiential background, cultural and language background, and personality characteristics.

