

**COMPETENCY 1.0 FOUNDATIONS OF READING****Skill 1.1 Understands reading as an interactive process of constructing meaning through dynamic interaction among the reader, the text and the reading situation**

Reading for enjoyment makes it possible to go to places in the world we will never be able to visit, or perhaps when we learn about the enchantments of a particular place, we will set a goal of going there someday. When *Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes was published, it became a best seller. It also increased tourism to Italy. Many of the readers of that book visited Italy for the first time in their lives.

In fiction, we can live through experiences that we will never encounter. We delve into feelings that are similar to our own or are so far removed from our own that we are filled with wonder and curiosity. In fact, we read because we're curious—curious to visit, experience, and know new and different things. The reader lives with a crowd of people and a vast landscape. Life is constantly being enriched by reading, and the mind is constantly being expanded. To read is to grow.

Sometimes the experience of reading a particular book or story is so delicious that we go back and read it again and again, such as the works of Jane Austen. We keep track of what is truly happening in the world when we read current best-sellers because they not only reflect what everyone else is interested in right now, they can also influence trends. We can know in-depth what television news cannot cover by reading publications like *Time* and *Newsweek*.

How do we model this wonderful gift for our students? We can bring those interesting stories into our classrooms and share the excitement we feel when we discover them. We can relate things that make us laugh so students may see the humor and laugh with us. We can vary the established curriculum to include something we are reading that we want to share. The tendency of students nowadays is to receive all of their information from television or the Internet. It's important for the teacher to help students understand that television and the Internet are not substitutes for reading. They should be an accessory, an extension, a springboard for reading.

Another thing teachers can do to inspire students to become readers is to assign a book that you have never read before and read along with them, chapter by chapter. Run a contest and the winner gets to pick a book that you and they will read chapter by chapter. If you are excited about it and are experiencing satisfaction from the reading, that excitement will be contagious. Be sure that the discussion sessions allow for students to relate what they are thinking and feeling about what they are reading. Lively discussions and the opportunity to express their own feelings will lead to more spontaneous reading. You can also hand out a reading list of your favorite books and spend some time telling the students what you liked about each. Make sure the list is diverse. It's good to include

nonfiction along with fiction. Don't forget that a good biography or autobiography may encourage students to read beyond thrillers and detective stories.

When the class is discussing the latest movie, whether formally as a part of the curriculum or informally and incidentally, if the movie is based on a book, this is a good opportunity to demonstrate how much more can be derived from the reading than from the watching. Or how the two combined make the experience more satisfying and worthwhile.

Share with your students the excitement you have for reading. Successful writers are usually good readers. The two go hand-in-hand.

In order to discover multiple layers of meaning in a literary work, the first step is a thorough analysis, examining such things as setting, characters and characterization, plot (focusing particularly on conflicts and pattern of action), theme, tone, figures of speech, and symbolism. It's useful in looking for underlying themes to consider the author's biography, particularly with regard to setting and theme, and the date and time of the writing, paying particular attention to literary undercurrents at the time as well as the political and social milieu.

Once the analysis is complete and data accumulated on the historical background, determine the overt meaning. What does the story say about the characters and their conflicts, where does the climax occur, and is there a denouement? Once the forthright, overt meaning is determined, then begin to look for undercurrents, subthemes that are related to the author's life and to what is going on in the literary, political, and social background at the time of writing.

In organizing a presentation of this material, it's usually best to begin with an explication of the overt level of meaning and then follow up with the other messages that emerge from the text.

To *interpret* means essentially to read with understanding and appreciation. It is not as daunting as it is made out to be. Simple techniques for interpreting literature are as follows:

- 1 **Context:** This includes the author's feelings, beliefs, past experiences, goals, needs, and physical environment. Incorporate an understanding of how these elements may have affected the writing to enrich an interpretation of it.
  - 2 **Symbols:** Also referred to as a sign, a symbol designates something which stands for something else. In most cases, it is standing for something that has a deeper meaning than its literal denotation. Symbols can have personal, cultural, or universal associations. Use an understanding of symbols to unearth a meaning the author might have intended but not expressed, or even something the author never intended at all.
- Questions:** Asking questions, such as "How would I react in this situation?" may shed further light on how you feel about the work.

**Skill 1.2 Understand the interrelationship of the communication arts – listening, speaking, reading and writing and that reading and writing are built on a strong oral foundation**

The Language Arts curriculum involves the experiences, study, and appreciation of how language is used for communication through listening, speaking, reading and writing. All four components work together to help develop language abilities, understanding of culture, and critical and creative thinking. When the various processes are integrated and used within meaningful contexts, it is easier to learn the facets of language. An integrated approach to language arts should be based on the prior knowledge and background experience of the students and on meaningful activities that the teacher provides in the classroom.

In the reading classroom, the teacher engages the students in a wide range of experiences and texts so that they can develop an increasing command over the English language. They learn to use and respond to language effectively and understand that literacy is of utmost importance in their lives. The principles that underlie the teaching of reading are as follows:

- 1 Language is the most powerful tool that students will have for communicating with others through listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is the way through which they will be able to make sense of the world, express their experiences and thoughts and develop ideas.
- 2 Language is an active process of making meaning by drawing on all sources and ways of knowing.
- 3 The way students use the components of language is personal and is tied to their individual learning styles and circumstances.
- 4 Cultural identity is explicitly expressed through language.

- 5 The prior knowledge and background experiences students bring to learning language directly impact language learning.
- 6 Language and reading are developmental as students develop sight words, fluency and accuracy in reading over time.
- 7 The concepts of language are best taught as a whole rather than in isolation.
- 8 The experiences teachers provide to students should be meaningful and built around experiences that help stimulate ideas.
- 9 Students need to be aware of the strategies and processes they need to construct meaning.
- 10 Frequent opportunities must be provided for students to assess their own learning, and they need feedback about their performance.
- 11 Both formative and summative assessment will help the teacher assess students' language learning.

In order to become fluent readers, students need to have phonemic and graphophonic awareness. This is provided through instruction in the classroom, by listening to the teacher or other adult read to them and by practicing the strategies for reading. Listening skills are important for students to hear the individual letter sounds, and they need to speak clearly in order to pronounce them. These aspects of language learning are the foci of teachers in the early grades to about Grade 3.

**Skill 1.3 Understands the diverse factors (e.g., cultural, linguistic, developmental, environmental) that affect reading**

There are several different factors that influence early literacy and language acquisition. They include:

- 1 The intellectual, social and emotional development of the child
- 2 The culture of the family
- 3 Socioeconomic circumstances
- 4 The support the child receives in reading development in the home – presence of print, books and the reading level of the parents
- 5 Prior experience with printed materials
- 6 Parental attitudes toward reading
- 7 Attendance in a preschool setting

Children learn more readily at an early age. This is why teaching the basic skills of reading at an early age is so important in reading development. So many children enter school with a deficiency in prior knowledge because they haven't been read to at home. In Kindergarten, teachers need to surround the children with print, read to them at every opportunity, and balance reading with instruction about letters and sounds. Teachers need to comprehend the stages of literacy development in order to provide the right instruction for each child in their classrooms. These stages and their characteristics are:

1. 0 to 4 years
  - enjoys having an adult read to them
  - likes to “pretend read” books
  - reads pictures of familiar books
  - recognizes some of the letters of the alphabet
  - practices printing own name
  - starts to sound out letters
2. Beginning Literacy: 5 – 7 years
  - Starts to develop phonemic awareness
  - Can associate letters with sounds
  - Starts to sound out words
  - Can recognize some sight words
  - Uses picture clues
  - Starts to use context clues when reading
  - Uses invented spelling when writing

3. Beginning Fluency: 7 to 8 years
  - Has a repertoire of sight vocabulary
  - Can read familiar stories fluently
  - Practices reading with a partner
  - Can retell stories with comprehension
  - Has greater speed and accuracy when reading
  - Finds it easy to write and spell familiar words
  
4. Literacy: 9 – 12 years
  - Reads fluently
  - Comprehends what is read
  - Has an expanded vocabulary
  - Writes for various purposes
  - Can use a dictionary for help with spelling
  - Can express personal tastes in reading

The typical variation in literacy backgrounds that children bring to reading can make teaching more difficult. Often a teacher has 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 for becoming "struggling readers."

**Skill 1.4      Understand the existing models or theories of the reading process and their implications for literacy instruction and curriculum development**

As a reading specialist, one duty you will be asked to fulfill may be updating and correlating the district reading curriculum. Curriculum writing is a skill unto itself and requires an understanding of developmentally appropriate practices, state standards, and materials and resources available.

It is important to understand that curriculum is not the same thing as a program. Many districts have what are called Core Curriculum programs. These commercially-developed products are meant to reach the majority of students and provide them with the necessary skills to be successful readers. Companies work hard to look at the state standards and tailor their products to meet these standards. The problem occurs usually due to the all encompassing nature of these commercial materials. The products have so many pieces and parts that certain specific areas may not be taught to the level some students need.

Each district across the country has its own reading curriculum. While they are aligned with the state standards, they are not exactly the same. Generally, the state provides its guidelines, in the form of standards, for the basic information important for students to have to be productive members of society. Therefore, state standards do not necessarily cover all aspects of reading that a district may feel are important to be taught. Curricula can be more involved and cover more details than the state requires. However, they should at a minimum address all of the identified state standards at a particular grade level.

Periodically, state departments of education will update and change the standards. This would be time to revise the district curriculum and incorporate the changes.

Additionally, new information may arise through research or through an analysis of testing scores which would further indicate a revision might be necessary. Curricula should be continuous works in progress. Keeping them current and filled with relevant information is important for the teachers to continue to provide adequate education.

*See also skill 5.5*

### **Skill 1.5 Understand the instructional role of assessment, diagnosis and evaluation**

When considering the role of assessment data gathered on students, it is important to quantify the information into terms easily recognized by other teachers, administrators, and parents. In reading, general practice is to categorize the information into levels of reading. These levels go across both kinds of assessments. They are composed of a combination of a word accuracy percentage and a comprehension percentage.

**Independent.** This level is the level at which the child can read text totally on his or her own. When reading books at the independent level, students will be able to decode between 95 and 100% of the words and comprehend the text with 90% comprehension or better. Many bodies of research indicate that about 98% accuracy makes for a good independent reader; however, there is other research that goes as low as 95% accuracy.

**Instructional.** This is the level at which the student should be taught because the text provides enough difficulty to increase their reading skills without providing so much that it becomes too cumbersome to finish the selection. Typically, the acceptable range for accuracy is between 85-94% with 75% or greater comprehension. Some standards rely on the number of errors made instead of the accuracy percentage with no more than one error out of twenty words read being the acceptable standard.

**Frustration.** Books at a student's frustration level are too difficult for that child and should not be used. The frustration level is any text with less than 85% word accuracy and/or less than 75% comprehension.

The use of independent, instructional and frustration levels allows educators to provide children with texts of different ranges depending on the skills necessary to be completed. Typically, standardized or formal assessments test at the instructional level. Therefore, if reading a standardized assessment such as an Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the reported reading level would be the instructional level for that student.

Additionally, some formal and informal tests use alternate methods of reporting information. Some use the grade level and month equivalent, where a 3.2 reading level would indicate the child is reading at the third grade level second month or typically October. Still others use their own leveling system. The Developing Readers Assessment (DRA) has its own unique method of coding book levels based on the work of Fountas and Pinnell. Regardless of the levels listed, the work can easily be translated into independent, instructional and frustration levels by examining the comprehension and the word reading accuracy portions of the assessment.

In the classroom, there are numerous ways to determine which students are in need of additional assistance. The most effective methods are to examine the classroom performance, available assessment data, and to work individually with the student.

Regular classroom teachers often have numerous concerns about the students they are working with in the classroom. They will seek out help from the reading specialist for additional strategies and support to help increase reading skills. It is important that the specialist be able to determine what difficulties require additional assistance and in which specific areas of reading to provide that assistance.

Running records are of tremendous value in this area. A running record is a fast and efficient way to examine the number and kind of errors students are making. Also, the levels at which the students are able to read can be a warning flag. If a student is struggling with material several grade levels below their current grade, it is important to determine the cause.

Once a general warning flag appears, it may be necessary for the specialist to look in depth and administer additional skill specific assessments or examine the data present in more depth. In general, it's good to keep in mind the five major areas of reading as a method of narrowing down the problem. These include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Identifying which of these areas is causing the problems helps the teacher and specialist to determine an appropriate plan of action to address skill deficits. Many children will demonstrate deficits in more than one area, so it is critical to follow the appropriate skill sequence to move the students forward in the most efficient manner possible.

Even knowing the broad area of difficulty may not be enough in itself. Sometimes very specific skill assessment or identification will need to occur before instruction can begin. Other times, a more global approach would be prudent. An example of a time that a global approach would be more beneficial might include a student who has all of the phonics skills in isolation but has difficulty applying them in text. In this case, spending more time teaching the phonics skills will not benefit the child, but rather spending the time helping the child to use other cueing systems beyond phonics in a broader sense through many passages and texts would be a more suitable use of time.

