

COMPETENCY 1.0 KNOWLEDGE OF THE THEORIES AND UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS OF READING PROCESSES

Skill 1.1 Identify foundational theories and theorists of reading processes and development

Decoding

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, many reading specialists, most prominently Fries (1962) believed that successful decoding resulted in reading comprehension. This meant that if children could sound out the words, they would then automatically be able to comprehend them. Many teachers of reading and many reading texts still subscribe to this theory.

Asking questions

Another theory or approach to the teaching of reading that gained currency in the late sixties and the early seventies was the importance of asking inferential and critical-thinking questions of the children that would challenge and engage them in the text. This approach to reading went beyond the literal level of what was stated in the text to an inferential level whereby text clues were needed to make predictions and to a critical level of involving the child in evaluating the text. While asking engaging and thought-provoking questions is still viewed as part of the teaching of reading, it is only viewed currently as a *component* of the teaching of reading.

Comprehension “Skills”

As various reading theories, practices, and approaches percolated during the 1970s and 1980s, many educators and researchers in the field came to believe that the teacher of reading needed to teach a set of discrete “Comprehension Skills” (Otto et al, 1977). Therefore, the reading teacher became the teacher of each individual comprehension skill. Children in such classrooms came away with main idea, sequence, cause and effect, and other concepts that were supposed to make them better comprehenders. However, did it make them lifelong readers?

Transactional Approach

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, researchers in the field of education, psychology, and linguistics, began to examine how the reader comprehends. Among them was Louise Rosenblatt who posited that reading is a transaction between the reader and the text. It is Rosenblatt (1978) who explained successful reading as the reader constructing a meaning from the text that reflected both the reader and the text.

She described two general purposes for reading: *effereent* and *aesthetic*. Efferent reading is looking for and remembering information to use functionally. Examples would be filling out a job application, reading a story in preparation for a test, or reading a newspaper article to find out who won the state basketball championship. Aesthetic reading is done to connect one's own life to the text, to be swept away by the beauty of a poem or to respond emotionally to a book such as *Bridge to Terabithia*.

These differing purposes call for somewhat different reading strategies: One might skim the newspaper article for basketball information but read a poem closely ten times and create mental images of different passages. Lastly, when children are asked to read all fiction differently (What's the setting? What's the main conflict in the plot? There will be a test on this on Thursday!), it can thwart a child's joy in the written word and work against the student's desire to be a lifelong reader.

Bottom-up, Top-down, Interactional Theories of Reading

Bottom-up theories of reading assume that children learn from part-to-whole starting with the smallest segments possible. Instruction begins with a strong phonics approach, learning letter-sound relationships, and often using basal readers or *decodable books*. Decodable books are vocabulary-controlled using language from word families with high predictability. Thus we get sentences like "Nan has a tan fan." Reading is seen as skills-based, and the skills are taught one at a time.

Top-down theories of reading suggest that reading begins with the reader's knowledge, not the print. Children are seen as having a drive to construct meaning. This approach views reading as moving from the whole to the parts. An early top-down theory was the *whole word* approach. Children memorized high-frequency words to assist them in reading the Dick and Jane books of the '30s. Then teachers helped children discover letter-sound correspondences in what they were reading. A more recent top-down theory is the *whole language* approach. This approach was influenced by research on how young children learned language. It was thought that children could learn to read as naturally as they learned to talk. Children were surrounded by print in their classrooms, quality literature often printed in Big Books, and were viewed as writers from the start. Hence kindergarten children kept journals. Advocates of whole language viewed the "skill'em-drill'em-and kill'em" approach based on bottom-up theories as a deadly dull introduction to the world of reading.

Interactive theories of reading combine the strengths of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Teachers need to be able to teach decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension skills to support children's drive for meaning and desire for a stimulating exchange with high-quality literary texts from their earliest days in school. Strategies include shared, guided, and independent reading; Big Books, reading, writing workshops, and the like. Today this approach is called the *balanced literacy approach*. It is considered to be a synthesis of the best from bottom-up and top-down methods.

Literacy and Literacy Learning

To be literate in the 21st century means more than being able to read and write. To live well and happily in today's society, an individual must be able to read not only newspapers and books, but e-mails, blogs, directions for how to use one's cell phone, and the like. A disconnect has evolved between the isolated reading-comprehension skills the schools are teaching and the literacy skills including listening and speaking that are crucial for employment and personal and academic success. Thornburg (1992, 2003) has also noted that technology capacities and the ability to communicate online are now integral parts of our sense of literacy.

Cooper (2004) views literacy as reading, writing, thinking, listening, viewing, and discussing. These are not viewed as separate activities or components of instruction, but rather as developing and being nurtured simultaneously and interactively. Children learn these abilities by engaging in authentic explorations, readings, projects, and experiences.

In learning how to ride a bike, the learner goes through various approximations before learning how to actually ride. The reader goes through similar approximations with the scaffold (support) of the teacher before developing his/her own independent literacy skills and capacities.

Emergent Literacy: the concept that young children are emerging into reading and writing with no real beginning or ending point. Children are introduced into the world of print as soon as their parents read board books to them at the age of one or two. When children scribble or use invented spelling during the preschool years, they reveal themselves as detectives of the written word, having watched parents and teachers make lists, write thank-you notes, or leave messages. This view of the reader assumes that all children have a drive to make meaning in print and will begin doing it almost on their own if surrounded by a print-rich environment.

Reading Readiness: an approach antithetical to emergent literacy in that it assumes that all children must have mastered a sequence of reading skills *before* they can begin to read. This approach stands in contrast to emergent literacy.

Language Acquisition: continuous and never-ending. From the perspective of this theory and research, all children come to school with a language base that the school must build on. As a consequence of the connection between oral language and reading, it is important that schools build literacy experiences around the language the child brings to the school.

Prior Knowledge, Schemata, Background, and Comprehension

Schemata are structures that represent generic concepts stored in our memory (Rumelhart, 1980). Young children develop their schemata through experiences. Prior knowledge and the lack of experience in some cases influence comprehension. The more closely the reader's experiences and schemata approximate those of the writer, the more likely the reader is to comprehend the text. It is obvious that for many children from non-English-language-speaking backgrounds and perhaps for those from struggling socioeconomic family structures, schemata deficits indicate the need for intense teacher support as these children become emergent and early readers.

Often the teacher will have to model and scaffold for the child the steps to form a schemata from the information provided in a text.

Comprehension: Cooper (2004) defines comprehension as "a strategic process by which readers construct or assign meaning to a text by using the clues in the text and their own prior knowledge." Comprehension is a process in which the reader transacts with the text to construct or assign meaning. Reading and writing are both interconnected and mutually supportive. Comprehension is a strategic process in which readers adjust their reading to suit their reading purpose and the type or genre of text they are reading. Narrative and expository texts require different reading approaches because of their different text structures.

Strategic readers also call into play their metacognitive capacities as they analyze texts so that they are self aware of the skills needed to construct meaning from the text structure.

The Role of Literature in Developing Literacy

The balanced literacy approach advocates the use of "real literature," recognized works of the best of children's fiction and non-fiction trade books and winners of such awards as the Newberry and Caldecott medals, for helping children develop literacy.

Balanced literacy advocates argue that:

- Real literature engages young readers and assures that they will become lifelong readers.
- Real literature also offers readers a language base that can help them expand their expressiveness as readers and as writers.
- Real literature is easier to read and understand than grade-leveled texts.

There are districts in the United States where the phonics-only approach is heavily embedded. However, the majority of school districts would describe their approach to reading as the balanced-literacy approach, which includes phonics work as well as the use of real literature texts. To contrast the phonics and balanced-literacy approaches as opposite is inaccurate, since a balanced approach includes both.

It is important to go online and to visit the key resources of the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and the IRA (International Reading Association) to keep abreast of the latest research in the field.

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Skill 1.2 Identify instructional applications of theories of reading processes and development

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness means the ability of the reader to recognize the sounds or phonemes of spoken language. This recognition includes how these sounds can be blended together, segmented (divided up), and manipulated (switched around). This awareness eventually leads to phonics, a method for decoding language by unlocking letter-sound or grapheme-phoneme relationships.

Development of phonological skills for most children begins during the pre-K years. Indeed, by the age of five, a child who has been exposed to finger plays and poetry can recognize a rhyme. Such a child can demonstrate phonological awareness by filling in the missing rhyming word in a familiar rhyme or rhymed picture book. The procedure of filling in a missing word is called the Cloze procedure. It can be used in oral or print literacy activities.

One teaches children phonological awareness by directly pointing out the sounds made by letters singly (as in /b/) or in combination (as in /bl/), and to recognize individual sounds in words.

Phonological awareness skills include but are not limited to the following:

1. Rhyming and syllabification.
2. Blending sounds into words—such as pic-tur-bo-k.
3. Identifying beginning or initial phonemes and ending or final phonemes in short, one-syllable words.
4. Breaking words down into sounds, which is also called “segmenting” words.
5. Removing initial sounds and substituting others. An example is /bat/ minus the /b/ with an /m/ substituted becomes /mat/.

The Role of Phonological Awareness in Reading Development

Instructional methods to teach phonological awareness may include any or all of the following:

1. Auditory games during which children recognize and manipulate the sounds of words, separate or segment the sounds of words, take out sounds, blend sounds, add in new sounds, or take apart sounds to recombine them in new formations.
2. Snap game. The teacher says two words. The children snap their fingers if the two words share a sound, which might be at the beginning or end of the word. Children hear initial phonemes most easily, followed by final ones. Medial or middle sounds are most difficult for young children to discriminate. One sees this in their oral responses as well as in their invented spelling. Silence occurs if the words share no sounds. Children love this simple game and it also helps with classroom management.
3. Language games model identification of rhyming words for children. These games help inspire children to create their own rhymes.
4. Read books that rhyme such as *Sheep in a Jeep* by Nancy Shaw or *The Fox on a Box* by Barbara Gregorich.
5. Share books with children that use alliteration (words that begin with the same consonant sound) such as *Avalanche, A to Z*.

Assessment of Phonological Awareness

These skills can be assessed by having the child listen to the teacher say two words. Then ask the child to decide if these two words are the same word repeated twice or two different words.

When making this assessment make certain that the two words only differ by one phoneme, such as /d/ and /g/.

Children can be assessed on words that are not real words but are familiar to them. Words used can be make-believe words.

The Role of Phonological Processing in the Development of Individual Students

Children who are raised in homes where English is not the first language and/or where standard English is not spoken may have difficulty hearing the difference between similar-sounding words like “send” and “sent.” Any child who is not in a home, day care, or preschool environment where English phonology operates may have difficulty perceiving and demonstrating the differences between English language phonemes. If children cannot hear the difference between words that “sound the same” like “grow” and “glow,” they will be confused when these words appear in a print context. This confusion will, of course, impact their comprehension.

Considerations for teaching phonological processing to ELL children include recognition by the teacher that what works for the English-language-speaking child from an English-language-speaking family does not necessarily work in other languages.

Research recommends that ELL children learn to read initially in their first language. It is critical for ELL learners to speak English before being taught to read it. Research supports the theory that oral language development lays the foundation for phonological awareness.

All phonological instruction programs must be tailored to the children’s learning backgrounds. Rhymes and alliteration introduced to ELL children should be read or shared with them in their first language if at all possible.

Points to Ponder

Phonological awareness is auditory.

It does not involve print.

It begins before children have learned letter-sound relationships.

It is the basis for the successful teaching of phonics and spelling.

It can and must be taught and nurtured.

It precedes and must be in place before the alphabetic principle can be taught.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is a specific skill within the broader category of phonological awareness. Probably developing fairly late, it is the knowledge that words are comprised of individual phonemes that can be blended. Theorist Marilyn Jaeger Adams, an early-reading researcher, has outlined five basic types of phonemic awareness tasks.

Task 1—Ability to hear rhymes and alliteration. For example, the children listen to a poem, rhyming picture book, or song and identify the rhyming words, which the teacher records or lists on chart.

Task 2—Ability to do oddity tasks (recognize the member of a set that is different [odd] among the group). For example, the children would look at the pictures of grass, a garden, and a rose, and identify the one that starts with a different sound.

Task 3—The ability to orally blend words and split syllables. For example, the children can say the first sound of a word and then the rest of the word and put it together as a single word.

Task 4—The ability to orally segment words. For example, the ability to count sounds. The child would be asked to count or clap the sounds in “hamburger.”

Task 5—The ability to do phonics manipulation tasks. For example, replace the “r” sound in rose with a “p” sound.

The Role of Phonemic Awareness in Reading Development

Children who have problems with phonics generally have not acquired or been exposed to phonemic-awareness activities at home or in preschool-2. This includes extensive songs, rhymes, and read-alouds.

Instructional Methods

Since the ability to distinguish between individual sounds or phonemes within words is a prerequisite to the association of sounds with letters and manipulating sounds to blend words—another way of saying “reading”—,the teaching of phonemic awareness is crucial to emergent literacy (early childhood K-2 reading instruction). Children need a strong background in phonemic awareness in order for phonics instruction (sound-spelling relationship—printed materials) to be effective.

Instructional methods that may be effective for teaching phonemic awareness can include:

- Clapping syllables in words.
- Distinguishing between a word and a sound.
- Using visual cues and movements to help children understand when the speaker goes from one sound to another.

- Incorporating oral segmentation activities that focus on easily-distinguished syllables rather than sounds.
- Singing familiar songs (e.g.. Happy Birthday and Knick Knack Paddy Wack) and replacing key words with those with a different ending.
- Dealing children a deck of picture cards and having them sound out the words for the pictures on their cards or calling for a picture by asking for its first and last sound.

Assessment of Phonemic Awareness

Teachers can maintain ongoing logs and rubrics for assessment throughout the year of phonemic awareness for individual children. Such assessments would identify particular stated reading behaviors or performance standards, the date of observation of the child's behavior (in this context, phonemic activity or exercise), and comments.

The rubric or legend for assessing these behaviors might include the following descriptors:

- Demonstrates or exhibits reading behavior consistently.
- Makes progress/strides toward this reading behavior.
- Has not yet demonstrated or exhibited this behavior.

Depending on the particular phonemic task the teacher models, the performance task might include:

- Saying rhyming words in response to an oral prompt.
- Segmenting a word spoken by the teacher into its beginning, middle, and ending sounds.
- Counting correctly the number of syllables in a spoken word.

Phonological awareness involves the recognition that spoken words are composed of a set of smaller units such as onsets, rhymes, syllables, and sounds. Phonemic awareness is a specific type of phonological awareness that focuses on the ability to distinguish, manipulate, and blend specific sounds or phonemes within an individual word. Think of phonological awareness as an umbrella and phonemic awareness as a specific spoke under this umbrella.

Phonics deals with printed words and the learning of sound-spelling correlations, while phonemic awareness activities are oral.

In reviewing reading research and theory, new distinctions and definitions appear often. The body of reading knowledge changes over time. The information and definitions in this guide are those accepted in the year of its publication and the time of its authoring and updating. As changes occur in accepted theories, they will be made in the guides and in the certification exams.

Helen Depree and Sandra Iversen, *Early Literacy in the Classroom*: “If you believe that you learn to read by reading, you must learn to want to read. Reading to children, therefore, models both the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of reading.”

Terrence Moore, Ashbrook Center, Fellow-Principal of Ridgeview Classical Schools in Fort Collins, Colorado: “The long talk that parents have put off about the ways of the world might need to be an introduction to the facts about the English alphabet.”