

COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPETENCE, INCLUDING INTERACTIONS AMONG READER, TEXT AND CONTEXT**Skill 1.1 Includes the development of emergent literacy in young children**

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 the student to comprehend what she is reading, she would need to be able to “fluently” piece words in a sentence together quickly. If a student is NOT fluent in reading, he or she would sound each letter or word out slowly and pay more attention to the phonics of each word. A fluent reader, 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 a student 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. Reading aloud to young children is one of the most important things that an adult can do, because they are teaching children how to monitor, question, predict and confirm what they hear in the stories. (Reid 1988, p. 165) 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.

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 and 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 "diverse learners."

Areas of Emerging Evidence

1. Experiences with print (through reading and writing) help preschool children develop an understanding of the conventions, purpose and functions of print. Children learn about print from a variety of sources and in the process come to realize that print carries the story. They also learn how text is structured visually (i.e.: text begins at the top of the page, moves from left to right, and carries over to the next page when it is turned). While knowledge about the conventions of print enables children to understand the physical structure of language, the conceptual knowledge that printed words convey a message also helps children bridge the gap between oral and written language.
2. Phonological awareness and letter recognition contribute to initial reading acquisition by helping children develop efficient word recognition strategies (e.g., detecting pronunciations and storing associations in memory). Phonological awareness and knowledge of print-speech relations play an important role in facilitating reading acquisition. Therefore, phonological awareness instruction should be an integral component of early reading programs. Within the emergent literacy research, viewpoints diverged on whether acquisition of phonological awareness and letter recognition are preconditions of literacy acquisition or whether they develop interdependently with literacy activities such as story reading and writing.

Storybook reading affects children's knowledge about, strategies for, and attitudes towards reading. Of all the strategies intended to promote growth in literacy acquisition, none is as commonly practiced, nor as strongly supported across the emergent literacy literature as storybook reading. Children in different social and cultural groups have differing degrees of access to storybook reading. For example, it is not unusual for a teacher to have students who have experienced thousands of hours of story reading time, along with other students who have had little or no such exposure.

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 (*child's* 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 child must be able to coordinate movement and recognize objects before she 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 as well as concrete operations, 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.

Sociocognitive approach

Other theorists in the 1970s proposed that language development results from sociolinguistic 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 sociocognitive 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 learner's need to be heard and understood and to influence others. Thus, his choices of vocabulary, tone and content are dictated by his ability to assess the language knowledge of his listeners. He is constantly applying his 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, a child would not pass beyond grunts and gestures as did primitive man.

Of course, the varying degrees of environmental stimuli to which children are exposed at all age levels creates 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 the sight recognition skills and are not yet ready to combine words in complex patterns.

Skill 1.2 Factors affecting readers' construction of meaning through interactions with text (e.g., readers' prior knowledge; nature, genre, structure and features of text; context of the reading act)

If there were two words which can be synonymous with reading comprehension as far as the balanced literacy approach is concerned, they would be "Constructing Meaning."

Cooper, Taberski, Strickland and other key theorists and classroom teachers, conceptualize the reader as designating a specific meaning to the text using both clues in the text and his/her own prior knowledge. Comprehension for the balanced literacy theorists is a strategic process.

The reader interacts with the text and brings his/her prior knowledge and experience to it or LACK of prior knowledge and experience to it. Writing is interlaced with reading and is a mutually integrative and supportive parallel process. Hence the division of literacy learning by the balanced literacy folks into reading workshop and writing workshop, with the same anchor readings or books being used for both.

Consider the sentence:

"The test booklet was white with black print, but very scary looking."

According to the idea of constructing meaning as the reader reads this sentence, the schemata (generic information stored in the mind) of texts he or she was personally activated by the author's ideas that texts are scary. Therefore, the ultimate meaning that the reader derives from the page is from the reader's own responses and experiences with the ideas the author presents. The reader constructs a meaning that reflects the author's intent and also the reader's response to that intent.

It is also to be remembered that generally, readings are fairly lengthy passages, comprised of paragraphs which in turn are comprised of more than one sentence. With each successive sentence, and every new paragraph, the reader refocuses. The schemata are reconsidered and a new meaning is constructed.

The purpose of reading is to convert visual images (the letters and words) into a message. Pronouncing the words is not enough; the reader must be able to extract the meaning of the text. When people read, they utilize four sources of background information to comprehend the meaning behind the literal text (Reid, pp.166-171).

1. **Word Knowledge** - information about words and letters. One's knowledge about word meanings is lexical knowledge—a sort of dictionary. Knowledge about spelling patterns and pronunciations is orthographic knowledge. Poor readers do not develop the level of automaticity in using orthographic knowledge to identify words and decode unfamiliar words.
2. **Syntax and Contextual Information** - when children encounter unknown words in a sentence, they rely on their background knowledge to choose a word that makes sense. Errors of younger children therefore are often substitutions of words in the same syntactic class. Poor readers often fail to make use of context clues to help them identify words or activate the background knowledge that would help them with comprehension. Poor readers also process sentences word by word, instead of "chunking" phrases and clauses, resulting in a slow pace that focuses on the decoding rather than comprehension. They also have problems answering wh- (who, what, where, when and why) questions as a result of these problems with syntax.
3. **Semantic Knowledge** -this includes the reader's background knowledge about a topic, which is combined with the text information as the reader tries to comprehend the material. New information is compared to the background information and incorporated into the reader's schema. Poor readers have problems with using their background knowledge, especially with passages that require inference or cause-and-effect.

4. **Text Organization** - good readers are able to differentiate types of text structure (e.g., story narrative, exposition, compare-contrast, or time sequence). They use knowledge of text to build expectations and construct a framework of ideas on which to build meaning. Poor readers may not be able to differentiate types of text and miss important ideas. They may also miss important ideas and details by concentrating on lesser or irrelevant details.

Research on reading development has yielded information on the behaviors and habits of good readers vs. poor readers. Some of the characteristics of good readers are:

- They think about the information that they will read in the text, formulate questions that they predict will be answered in the text, and confirm those predictions from the information in the text.
- When faced with unfamiliar words, they attempt to pronounce them using analogies to familiar words.
- Before reading, good readers establish a purpose for reading, select possible text structure, choose a reading strategy, and make predictions about what will be in the reading.
- As they read, good readers continually test and confirm their predictions, go back when something does not make sense, and make new predictions.

See also Skill 1.3 and Skill 5.3

Skill 1.3 Nature, genre, structure and features of text

Text Structure

Text structure refers to the patterns of textual organization in a piece of writing. Authors will arrange their writings into various structures in order to make their content more comprehensible. For example, when explaining an historical event, an author may arrange her text in a cause-effect structure; in other words, the text presents causes of an event, then it provides the potential or actual effects. Or, if an author is telling a story, such as in a literary narrative, the author may decide to arrange the text in basic, chronological events. The author could also provide flashbacks or other disruptions in a sequence—and that would change the text structure.

Particularly in information texts, text structure helps readers make sense of the content. When readers identify a text structure, they often have an easier time comprehending the text. For example, let's say we are reading an essay that contains one paragraph explaining an opinion of a political issue and nine or ten paragraphs re-telling stories of people. One might believe that the essay is merely a collection of stories about people. However, it is entirely possible that the text structure works like this:

OPINION
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE
EXAMPLE
...SOFORTH

So, how do teachers help students to understand the concept of text structure and use it in their own reading? Often, modeling (and then giving students practice) in text structure analysis is quite effective. Graphic organizers also provide a visual tool to help students make sense of text structure. In general, giving students the chance to practice with identifying the structures in texts will help them to do it on their own with the books and shorter texts they read outside of school.

Elements of good writing

Recognizing the main idea

A **topic** of a paragraph or story is what the paragraph or story is about.

The **main idea** of a paragraph or story states the important idea(s) that the author wants the reader to know about a topic.

The topic and main idea of a paragraph or story are sometimes directly stated.

There are times; however, that the topic and main idea are not directly stated, but simply implied.

Look at this paragraph.

Henry Ford was an inventor who developed the first affordable automobile. The cars that were being built before Mr. Ford created his Model-T were very expensive. Only rich people could afford to have cars.

The topic of this paragraph is Henry Ford. The main idea is that Henry Ford built the first affordable automobile.

Identifying supporting details

The **supporting details** are sentences that give more information about the topic and the main idea.

The supporting details in the aforementioned paragraph about Henry Ford would be that he was an inventor and that before he created his Model-T, only rich people could afford cars because they were too expensive.

Reading an essay should not take extraordinary effort. Particularly if the concepts are not too complex, reading an essay should not require extensive re-reading. The ideas should be clear and straightforward. Anyone who has tried to write an essay knows that this sounds much easier than it really is! So, how do teachers actually help students to become proficient with writing multi-paragraph essays in ways that allow them to clearly communicate their ideas? The trick is to help them understand that various conventions of writing serve the purpose of making comprehension easier for their readers. Those conventions include good paragraphing, transitions between paragraphs, ideas and sentences, topic sentences, concluding sentences, appropriate vocabulary and sufficient context.

Good paragraphing entails dividing up ideas into bite-sized chunks. A good paragraph typically includes a topic sentence that explains the content of the paragraph. A good paragraph also includes sufficient explanation of that topic sentence. So, for example, if a topic sentence suggests that the paragraph will be about the causes of the Civil War, the rest of the paragraph should actually explain specific causes of the Civil War.

As writers transition from one paragraph to another—or sentence to another—they will usually provide transitional phrases that give sign-posts to readers about what is coming next. Words like “however,” “furthermore,” “although,” “likewise,” and etc., are good ways of communicating intention to readers. When ideas are thrown together on a page, it is hard to tell what the writer is actually doing with those ideas. Therefore, students need to become familiar with using transitional phrases.

Concluding sentences can often be unnecessary, but when done right, they provide a nice “farewell” or closing to a piece of writing. Students do not always need to use concluding sentences in paragraphs; however, they should be alerted to their potential benefits.

When writers use appropriate vocabulary, they are sensitive to the audience and purpose of what they are writing. For example, if I am writing an essay on a scientific concept to a group of non-scientists, I will not use specialized vocabulary to explain concepts. However, if I were writing for a group of scientists, not using that vocabulary may not look so good. It depends on what the writer intends with the piece of writing. Therefore, students need to learn early on that all writing has purpose and that because of that purpose, good writers will make conscious decisions about how to arrange their texts, which words to use, and which examples and metaphors to include.

Finally, when writers provide sufficient context, they ensure that readers do not have to extensively question the text to figure out what is going on. Again, this has a lot to do with knowing the audience. Using the scientific concept example from above, I would need to provide more context if my audience was a group of non-scientists than I would if my audience were scientists. In other words, I would have to provide more background so that the non-scientists could understand the concepts.

Skill 1.4 Context of the reading act

The act of reading is an interactive process that is dynamic and constantly changing. The comprehension of written texts requires interpretation of language in print form. The act of creating meaning from the symbols on the page is considerably complex and relies on the reader's cognitive and linguistic abilities beyond just their perception of typographical marks.

Reading is interactive. Reading is a process that has various stages (before, during, and after reading) in which different tasks are performed. In order to construct meaning the mind of the reader interacts, conducts a dialogue, actively engages with the text to decode, assign meaning and interpret. The reader applies prior knowledge of the world to this act of reading.

Students with learning disabilities or dyslexia often struggle with the process of constructing meaning. In the decoding stage, they will often have to sound out syllables and words, and tend to read word-for-word rather than in phrases or chunks. Reading word-for-word creates numerous one-word chunks; far too many to be retained in the reader's working memory; therefore, the student loses the ability to later constructing meaning to the text.

Hints for Students When They Are Stuck

- Stop! Think!
- Ask
 - What is the sentence talking about?
 - What information is it giving me?
- Back up and reread
 - Say the first part of the word.
 - What would make sense?
- Read on to the end of the paragraph.
 - What would make sense?
- Reread and read on
- Cut
 - Find a part in the word you know
 - Chunk it into familiar parts (prefixes, root words, suffixes)
- Connect (word families or analogies)
- Ask
 - What is the paragraph talking about?
 - What information is it giving me?

Reading comprehension requires concentration, motivation, and the mental framework for holding ideas together. Every new reading assignment will increase the student's opportunities to learn more about this process, understanding there is a message to be constructed through the reading of the text.

Skill 1.5 Knowledge of different comprehension strategies for different purposes (e.g., reading a textbook to review for a test and reading for enjoyment)

Making Predictions

One 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 reader which would challenge and engage the children in the text. This approach to reading went beyond the literal level of what was stated in the text to an inferential level of using text clues 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.

Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge can be defined as all of an individual's prior experiences, learning, and development which precede his/her entering a specific learning situation or attempting to comprehend a specific text. Sometimes prior knowledge can be erroneous or incomplete. Obviously, if there are misconceptions in a child's prior knowledge, these must be corrected so that the child's overall comprehension skills can continue to progress. Prior knowledge, of even kindergarteners includes their accumulated positive and negative experiences both in and out of school.

These might range from wonderful family travels, watching television, visiting museums and libraries, to visiting hospitals, prisons and surviving poverty. Whatever the prior knowledge that the child brings to the school setting, the independent reading and writing the child does in school immeasurably expands his/her prior knowledge and hence broadens his/her reading comprehension capabilities.

Literary response skills are dependent on prior knowledge, schemata and background. Schemata (the plural of schema) are those structures which represent generic concepts stored in our memory. Effective comprehenders of text, whether they are adults or children, use both their schemata and prior knowledge PLUS the ideas from the printed text for reading comprehension, and graphic organizers help organize this information.

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers solidify in a chart format a visual relationship among various reading and writing ideas including: sequence, timelines, character traits, fact and opinion, main idea and details, differences and likenesses (generally done using a VENN DIAGRAM of interlocking circles, KWL Chart, and etc.). These charts and formats are essential for providing scaffolding for instruction through activating pertinent prior knowledge.

KWL charts are exceptionally useful for reading comprehension by outline what they KNOW, what they WANT to know, and what they've LEARNED after reading. Students are asked to activate prior knowledge about a topic and further develop their knowledge about a topic using this organizer. Teachers often opt to display and maintain KWL charts throughout a text to continually record pertinent information about students' reading.

When the teacher first introduces the K-W-L strategy, the children should be allowed sufficient time to brainstorm in response to the first question, what all of them in the class or small group actually know about the topic. The children should have a three-columned K-W-L worksheet template for their journals and there should be a chart to record the responses from class or group discussion. The children can write under each column in their own journal, and should also help the teacher educator with notations on the chart. This strategy involves the children actually gaining experience in note taking and having a concrete record of new data and information they have gleaned from the passage about the topic.

Depending on the grade level of the participating children, the teacher may also want to channel them into considering categories of information they hope to find out from the expository passage. For instance, they may be reading a book on animals to find out more about the animal's habitats during the winter or about the animal's mating habits.

When children are working on the middle-"What I want to know section"-of their K-W-L strategy sheet, the teacher may want to give them a chance to share what they would like to learn further about the topic and help them to express it in question format.

K-W-L is useful and can even be introduced as early as grade 2 with extensive teacher discussion support. It not only serves to support the child's comprehension of a particular expository text, but also models for children a format for note taking. Beyond note taking, when the teacher wants to introduce report writing, the K-W-L format provides excellent outlines and question introductions for at least three paragraphs of a report.

In addition to its usefulness with thematic unit study, K-W-L is wonderful for Cooper (2004) recommends this strategy for use with thematic units and with reading chapters in required science, social studies or health text books providing the teacher with a concrete format to assess how well children have absorbed pertinent new knowledge within the passage (by looking at the third L section). Ultimately, it is hoped that students will learn to use this strategy, not only under explicit teacher direction with templates of K-W-L sheets, but also on their own by informally writing questions they want to find out about in their journals and then going back to their own questions and answering them after the reading.

Note Taking

Older children take notes in their reading journals, while younger children and those more in need of explicit teacher support contribute their ideas and responses as part of the discussion in class. Their responses are recorded on the experiential chart.

- **See also Skill 4.2**

Connecting Texts

The concept of readiness is generally regarded as a developmentally based phenomenon. Various abilities, whether cognitive, affective, or psychomotor, are perceived to be dependent upon the mastery or development of certain prerequisite skills or abilities. Readiness, then, implies that the necessary prior knowledge, experience and readiness

prerequisites should not engage in the new task until first acquiring the necessary readiness foundation.

Readiness for subject area learning is dependent not only on prior knowledge, but also on affective factors such as interest, motivation and attitude. These factors are often more influential on student learning than the pre-existing cognitive base.

When texts relate to a student's life or other reading materials or areas of study, they become more meaningful and relevant to students' learning. Students enjoy seeing reading material connect to their life, other subject areas and other reading material.

Discussing the Text

Discussion is an activity in which the children (and this activity works well from grades 3-6 and beyond) conclude a particular text. Among the prompts, the teacher-coach might suggest that the children focus on words of interest they encountered in the text. These can also be words that they heard if the text was read aloud. Children can be asked to share something funny or upsetting or unusual about the words they have read. Through this focus on children's response to words as the center of the discussion circle, peers become more interested in word study.

Furthermore, in the current teaching of literacy; reading, writing, thinking, listening, viewing and discussing are not viewed as separate activities or components of instruction, but rather as developing and being nurtured simultaneously and interactively.

