READING AND LEARNING TO READ, 6/e

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Jo Anne L. Vacca, Richard T. Vacca, Mary K. Gove, Christine A. McKeon, Linda C. Burkey, & Lisa A. Lenhart

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sample chapter 2

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Approaches to Reading Instruction

Standards in This Chapter:
- 1.1
- 1.2
- 1.3
- 1.4
- 2.1
- 2.2
- 2.3
- 4.1
- 4.2
- 4.3
In this chapter, you will discover:

- The relationship between comprehensive instruction and beliefs about reading
- How beliefs are connected to different theoretical models of reading
- Curricular differences among bottom-up and top-down models of reading
- Instructional approaches in the teaching of reading
- What it means to achieve a comprehensive program
Katie attended a private college located in a suburb of the city. The college offered a small teacher education program. Katie’s reading and reading-related courses included elementary reading, children’s literature, and language arts. The reading and language arts courses were taught by the same instructor. Katie participated in numerous hours of field experience throughout the junior and senior years of the program. She especially enjoyed her reading courses because the instructor “challenged us to think about reading as language, not just skills to be taught in itsy-bitsy pieces.” During many of her visits “in the field,” the instruction that Katie observed wasn’t congruent with what she was learning in her reading classes. The incongruity was the subject of much inquiry and debate: Should future teachers maintain the status quo, or should they be innovators who bring new ideas into the teaching profession, especially about the teaching of literacy?

Katie’s school is situated in the inner city. About 70 percent of the children are from minority backgrounds. The principal is considered a “strong instructional leader.” She believes that an “effective school must maintain high expectations for student achievement, an orderly climate, and a rigorous assessment program to monitor children’s educational progress.” As a result, the principal is a proponent of a “teach, test, teach” model for instruction. She indicates to Katie that it is OK to try out new teaching strategies, “as long as you are teaching the skills the children need.” How well children scored on achievement tests is one of the main indicators of a teacher’s success.

Katie feels the pressure of “having to teach skills in isolation.” This approach, she admits, is not “what I believe in,” but she feels obligated to follow the curriculum “like all of the other teachers.”

Prior to the opening of school, Katie had spent two weeks planning what she was going to do. One of her first tasks was to fix up the room so that it would “invite kids to learn.” The room has a reading corner and a “writer’s nook.” Both areas are stocked with children’s books, paper, pencils, markers, scissors, and posters. The reading corner has a throw rug, a book rack, and an old couch that Katie got from her parents. The writer’s nook has a round table and computer.

The reality of teaching reading skills is omnipresent, despite Katie’s attempts to provide meaningful experiences for her first graders. Periodically, she is required to test children to determine mastery of the skills. The principal also requires that weekly lesson plans be in her office in advance on Friday afternoons. Katie’s plans are returned on Monday morning, before the start of school, with comments and notations.

In practice, Katie tries to teach a dual reading curriculum. She teaches the skills using workbooks in the morning, and she “smuggles in the good stuff” whenever she can find the time. Needless to say, Katie goes home each day exhausted and frustrated. She complains that she spends more time giving tests than she spends on instruction. The reading corner and the writer’s nook are underused. “At least,” Katie says, “I still read the class a story every day.”
Although she tries to combine skills teaching with more top-down activities, Katie’s instruction is out of balance. Her philosophical stance is in direct conflict with the principal’s beliefs about learning to read. The external pressure to conform to the principal’s expectations for skills instruction forces Katie to put her knowledge and beliefs about learning to read on hold. Although she attempts to mesh literature and language-rich activities with skills instruction, it simply doesn’t work for her because she is caught between two disparate instructional methodologies. Her efforts to be “eclectic” simply create a disjointed mishmash of instructional activity.

This chapter helps you make connections between theory and practice as you explore issues related to achieving a comprehensive approach to the teaching of reading. First, we explore theoretical perspectives and belief systems related to the teaching of reading. Next, you will learn how curricular issues and approaches to teaching reading have emerged. In the final section, you will read about approaches to teaching a comprehensive reading program. As you study the concept map, note the relationships among beliefs, curricular perspectives and approaches to instruction.

Belief Systems and Approaches to Literacy Instruction

In the search to build a comprehensive literacy program, it is critical for teachers to be aware of the needs of students. Consider this quote from the International Reading Association’s (IRA) position statement “Using Multiple Methods of Beginning Reading Instruction” (1999):

There is no single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach. (para. 2)

Literacy programs require an informed philosophical stance. A teacher’s philosophical stance, or belief system, is crucial to achieving balance in the teaching of reading because instruction involves the kinds of decisions that teachers make based on how children learn to read and how they can best be taught.

As noted in Chapter 1, what teachers do to teach reading usually reflects what they know and believe about reading and learning to read. One way to examine your beliefs about reading and learning to read is to connect them to theoretical models of the reading process. Does your philosophical stance reflect a bottom-up view of reading? Top-down? Or interactive? Throughout this book, we contend that teachers who use a more comprehensive approach to teaching reading will meet the needs of their students when their instructional decisions and practices reflect the interactive nature of the reading process. Interactive models underscore the important contributions that both the reader and the text make in the reading process.

One important way to define who we are as teachers of reading is by talking about what we do and why we do it or by observing one another in a teaching situation and asking why we did what we did. Another way is through self-examination and reflection. The tools that follow will help you inquire into your beliefs about reading in relation to instructional practices.
Beliefs About Reading Interview

Your beliefs about how students learn to read in all likelihood lie on a continuum between concepts that reflect bottom-up, interactive, and top-down models of reading. By participating in the Beliefs About Reading Interview (see the Viewpoint in Box 2.1), you will get a general indication of where your beliefs about learning to read lie on the continuum illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Your responses in the interview will often mirror units of language emphasized for instructional purposes. For example, the smallest units of written language are letters; the largest unit is the text selection itself. In Figure 2.2, concentric boxes help illustrate units of written language. The largest box represents the text as a whole. It may be a story, a poem, or an article on the Civil War. This unit of language is made up of paragraphs, which are made up of sentences, which are made up of words, which are made up of letters.

Use this opportunity to express your views and beliefs about reading.

If you are a preservice teacher studying reading for the first time, you may find it difficult to answer some of the questions in Question Set A. However, we encourage you to respond to all of the questions based on any sources of knowledge and beliefs you currently hold about the reading process and how it should be taught. Knowledge sources may include your own school experiences, observations in the field, experiences as a reader, and previous study. Toward the end of the semester, you may wish to respond to the interview questions again. This will provide a good measure of the growth you have made in thinking about reading and learning to read. Team up with a partner, if possible, and take turns interviewing each other. Study the directions and respond to the appropriate set of questions in the Beliefs About Reading Interview.

Use Appendix A to analyze and interpret your beliefs about reading and learning to read. Appendix A will provide you with a general framework for determining whether you view reading and learning to read from a bottom-up, interactive, or top-down perspective.

Beliefs About Reading Interview

Directions: Select Question Set A if you are preparing to become a teacher. Select Question Set B if you are presently a teacher. Respond to each question, thinking in terms of your own classroom—either the one in which you plan to teach or the one in which you now teach. As you respond to each question, explain what you (would) do and why you (would) do it.

Question Set A: Preservice Teachers

1. You have just signed a contract for your first teaching position in an elementary school. Which goals for reading instruction do you feel most confident about making progress in during the school year?

2. Suppose that a student is reading orally in your class and makes a reading error. What is the first thing you will probably do? Why?

3. Another student in your class is reading orally and doesn’t know a word. What are you going to do? Why?

4. You have read about and probably tried out different kinds of strategies and activities for teaching students to read. Which ones do you feel will be the most important in your classroom? Why?

5. What kinds of activities do you feel your students should be involved in for the majority of their reading instructional time? Why?

6. Here are the typical steps in a directed reading activity as suggested in basal reader manuals: (1) introduction of vocabulary, (2) motivation or setting purposes, (3) reading, (4) questions and discussion after silent reading, and (5) skills practice for rein-
Belief Systems and Approaches to Literacy Instruction

Question Set B: Inservice Teachers

1. Of all the goals for reading instruction that you have in mind as a teacher, which do you think you have made good progress toward accomplishing this year? Cite one or more and, for each, explain why.

2. What do you usually do when a student is reading orally and makes an oral reading error? Why?

3. What do you usually do when a student is reading orally and doesn’t know a word? Why?

4. You probably use different kinds of strategies and activities in teaching reading. Which ones do you feel are the most important for your students? Why?

5. What kinds of activities do you feel students should be involved in for the majority of their reading instructional time? Why?

6. Here are the typical steps in a directed reading activity as suggested in basal reader manuals: (1) introduction of vocabulary, (2) motivation or setting purposes, (3) reading, (4) questions and discussion after silent reading, and (5) skills practice for reinforcement. Rank these steps in order from most important to least important (not necessarily in the order you follow them).

7. Is it important to introduce new vocabulary words before your students read a selection? Why or why not?

8. Assuming that your students were tested to provide you with information that helped you decide how to instruct them in reading, what did diagnostic testing include? What kind of information did it give you about your individual students?

9. During silent reading, what do you hope your students do when they come to an unknown word?

10. Look at the oral reading mistakes that are underlined on the transcripts of three readers in item 10 of Question Set A. Which of these three readers do you deem the best or most effective reader?
Teachers who possess a bottom-up belief system believe that students must decode letters and words before they are able to construct meaning from sentences, paragraphs, and larger text selections. Consequently, they view reading acquisition as mastering and integrating a series of word identification skills. Letter–sound relationships and word identification are emphasized instructionally. Because recognizing each word is believed to be an essential prerequisite to being able to comprehend the passage, accuracy in recognizing words is seen as important. If you hold a bottom-up set of beliefs, you may consider the practice of correcting oral reading errors as important in helping children learn to read. Or you may believe that helping students read a passage over and over is an important instructional activity because they develop accurate word recognition. Teachers who hold bottom-up belief systems often emphasize the teaching of skills in a sequential and systematic manner.

Teachers who have a top-down belief system consider reading for meaning an essential component of all reading instructional situations. They feel that the majority of reading or language arts instructional time should involve students in meaningful activities in which they read, write, speak, and listen. These teachers may also emphasize the importance of students’ choosing their own reading material and enjoying the material they read. Sentences, paragraphs, and text selections are the units of language emphasized instructionally. Because recognizing each word is not considered an essential prerequisite to comprehending the passage, word errors during oral reading may not be corrected. Instead, the teacher may advocate noninterference during oral reading or encourage a student to use the context or meaning of the passage to identify unrecognized words.

Teachers who hold an interactive view of reading and learning to read fall between bottom-up and top-down belief systems on the beliefs continuum. Such teachers recognize that a reader processes both letter–sound cues and meaning cues during reading. Reading as a meaning-making activity is utmost in their thoughts about reading and learning to read, but they also believe that readers must be able to identify words quickly and accurately if they are going to make sense of what they read. Moreover, teachers
with interactive belief systems integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities; in the process of doing so, they scaffold children’s literacy experiences. Scaffolding, as you will learn in more detail later in the chapter, suggests that teachers provide instructional support and guidance in the development of skills and strategies. Because they recognize the importance of teaching skills and strategies, interactive teachers blend explicit instruction with children’s immersion in various reading and writing activities. Teachers who possess interactive belief systems are likely to achieve balance in the teaching of reading because they strike an equilibrium between children’s immersion in reading and writing experiences and their development as skillful and strategic readers and writers.

Table 2.1 summarizes the beliefs defining bottom-up, top-down, and interactive belief systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BOTTOM-UP BELIEFS ABOUT READING</th>
<th>TOP-DOWN BELIEFS ABOUT READING</th>
<th>INTERACTIVE BELIEFS ABOUT READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of word recognition to comprehension</td>
<td>Believe students must recognize each word in a selection to be able to comprehend the selection.</td>
<td>Believe students can comprehend a selection even when they are not able to identify each word.</td>
<td>Believe students can comprehend by identifying words quickly and accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of information cues</td>
<td>Believe students should use word and letter–sound cues exclusively to identify unrecognized words.</td>
<td>Believe students should use meaning and grammatical cues in addition to letter–sound cues to identify unrecognized words.</td>
<td>Believe students process letter–sound and meaning cues simultaneously to identify unrecognized words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of reading</td>
<td>Believe reading requires mastering and integrating a series of word identification skills.</td>
<td>Believe students learn to read through meaningful and authentic activities in which they read, write, speak, and listen.</td>
<td>Believe students learn to read by developing skills and strategies in meaningful contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where importance is placed instructionally</td>
<td>View accuracy in identifying words as important.</td>
<td>View reading for meaning as important.</td>
<td>View accurate word identification as contributing to meaningful reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Think students need to be assessed on discrete skills.</td>
<td>Think students need to be assessed on the kind of knowledge constructed through reading.</td>
<td>Think students need to be assessed on the basis of their performance in meaningful contexts. Assessment informs instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile

The Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), designed by Diane De Ford in 1985, is a highly reliable survey instrument used to determine teacher beliefs about practices in reading instruction. De Ford identifies three belief systems or theoretical orientations associated with instructional practices in beginning reading: phonics, skills, and whole language. Phonics and skills orientations are equivalent to bottom-up beliefs about reading. A whole language orientation is associated with top-down beliefs.

Appendix B contains the TORP survey and guidelines for determining your theoretical orientation toward reading. We invite you to complete the TORP survey because it will help you extend your thinking about instructional practices associated with learning to read. A teacher who holds a bottom-up orientation, for example, is likely to enact a curriculum that is quite different from a teacher who maintains a top-down orientation. Understanding the difference is essential to a teacher's approach to the teaching of reading.

Curriculum Perspectives

The term curriculum has various shades of meaning in education. One of the long-held conceptions of curriculum practice is that it centers on the selection and organization of objectives, content, and instructional activities and on the evaluation of learning (Tyler, 1949). The objectives of a curriculum become the “standards” that teachers use to make decisions about instruction and assessment. One way to think about curriculum, albeit a static conception, is that it represents courses of study that are based on national, state, and local school district policies. A curriculum course of study provides a blueprint for instruction that teachers are expected to follow.

A more dynamic conception of curriculum, however, is that it reflects what teachers and students do as they engage in classroom activity. As Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) put it, “Perhaps the most visible aspect of curriculum is a teacher's educational activities—what actually occurs in the classroom” (p. 16). If curriculum represents what teachers and students actually do in the classroom, a teacher's beliefs about literacy learning invariably contribute to curriculum decisions. These decisions involve, among other things, (1) the instructional objectives the teacher emphasizes for the classroom literacy program; (2) the materials the teacher selects and uses for instruction; (3) the learning environment the teacher perceives as most conducive to children's development as readers and writers; (4) the practices, approaches, and instructional strategies the teacher uses to teach reading and writing; and (5) the kinds of assessment the teacher perceives are best to evaluate literacy learning.

Curriculum-related questions every teacher has struggled with (or is struggling with) concern the teaching of literacy skills and strategies: What should children know and be able to do as readers and writers? Which skills and strategies are important? How do I teach skills and strategies? Answers to these questions will differ, depending on the curriculum perspective underlying the literacy program. Two curriculum perspectives—bottom-up and top-down—each supported by differing assumptions and principles about learning to read and write, have resulted in dramatically different objectives, materials, practices, and decisions related to literacy instruction.
Bottom-Up Curricula

READERS AND TEXTBOOKS ● The New England Primer, published for American colonists in the late 1600s, followed a strong bottom-up model of instruction. The alphabet was taught first; then vowels, consonants, double letters, italics, capitals, syllables, and so on were presented for instruction, in that order. Words were not introduced systematically in basal readers until the mid-1800s. Colonial children might meet anywhere from 20 to 100 new words on one page!

By the mid-1800s, the word method, silent reading, and reading to get information from content were introduced in basals. The classics, fairy tales, and literature by U.S. authors became the first supplementary reading materials. Colored pictures, subjects appealing to children's interests, and the teacher's manual had all been introduced by the 1920s. It was then that a work pad was used for seatwork and skills practice in grades 1 through 3.

Publishing companies began to expand and add new components or features to their basal reading programs around 1925. The preprimer, for example, was added to the basal program to introduce beginning readers to the series and build a beginning reading vocabulary (i.e., words recognized on sight). Inside illustrations and outside covers also became increasingly colorful. Word lists became the standard for choosing readers' vocabulary.

As the major author for the publishing house Scott Foresman, William S. Gray was probably responsible for much of the structure associated with the reading instruction that we experienced as children. Workbooks accompanied our reader. First we worked on skills; then we read for enjoyment. Each book had a different title, and much of the story content was supposed to be “realistic” narrative. Whether the content was or is realistic is an issue both publishers and classroom teachers continue to debate.

As the concept of reading readiness became more popular, teacher's manuals began adding more detail, and readiness books provided opportunities to practice prerequisite skills. One preprimer proliferated into two, three, or even four preprimers.

Instruction in basal reading programs depended in part on a strict adherence to the scope and sequence of reading skills. The terminology evolved from the 1948 Ginn Basic Reader, the objective of which was to provide a vertical arrangement of skill development and to ensure continuity in skill development (Smith, 1965, p. 285). Teacher's editions were keyed to the children's books, and diagnostic and achievement tests were developed. Basal reading programs had become more sophisticated and, to many teachers, unwieldy.

Until the 1960s, books in reading series were arranged according to grade placement. Grades evolved into levels (anywhere from 15 to 20) or, as it became known, the management system. By the 1970s, teachers and curriculum committees in general sought clarification about levels in relation to grades. As a result, publishers used the term level and cross-referenced this with its traditional grade equivalent.

Management systems became necessary when publishers significantly overhauled their reading series in the 1970s. The majority of textbook publishers added new components, particularly in the area of assessment, such as pre- and postskill tests, section tests, and end-of-book tests.

The reading series used in schools in the twenty-first century are a far cry, in both appearance and substance, from the first readers. Nevertheless, current reading books retain some of the features that were once innovative. The new basal reading series have grown noticeably in size and price. Though not prescribing the bottom-up teaching approach that was used in the 1600s, today's teacher's manual presents a dilemma that is at
the same time intriguing, interesting, and a bit daunting: It often purports to include everything that any teacher will ever need to teach reading.

THE FIRST-GRADE STUDIES ● While publishing companies were busy overhauling their programs, the federal government founded the United States Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction (Bond & Dykstra, 1967), a large government-funded study commonly referred to as the “First-Grade Studies.” These studies were launched nationally in an effort to identify the best approaches to the teaching of reading. It was one of the most influential and ambitious undertakings in reading research during the twentieth century. The First-Grade Studies compiled data from 27 individual research projects examining the effects of instructional approaches on beginning reading and spelling achievement. These instructional approaches included phonics, linguistic readers, basal programs, initial teaching alphabet, literature-based reading, language experience, and various grouping schemes and combinations of instruction. The First-Grade Studies found that no instructional approach was superior to the others for students at either high or low levels of readiness. Instead, the findings suggest “that although no single method proved best, combinations of methods were associated with the highest achievement” (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997).

The First-Grade Studies, more than anything else, underscored the importance of the “teacher variable” in children’s reading achievement. Teachers make a difference. The more informed and knowledgeable they are, the more teachers are able to deal with the complexities of literacy learning as they respond to the how, when, and why of instruction. A significant by-product of the studies was the redirection of instruction away from materials being used by teachers to teachers and their craft (Robinson, Faraone, Hittleman, & Unruh, 1990).

Top-Down Curricula

Late in the twentieth century the bottom-up perspective was seriously challenged by educators whose belief system came from a whole language orientation. Whole language was a progressive, child-centered movement that took root in the 1960s and blossomed in the 1980s. A whole language curriculum reflects the belief that students learn to read through meaningful experiences. These experiences include students’ reading, writing, speaking, and listening about things important to them.

Teachers who maintain a whole language perspective believe in weaving into their teaching the use of authentic texts for children to read, discuss, listen to, or write about. One of the main goals of a whole language curriculum is to support children in the skillful use of language. They develop skills and strategies, but they do so in the context of meaningful learning. The development of skills and strategies is not assumed to occur in linear progression as in a skills-based curriculum. Instead, children grow as readers and writers, both vertically and horizontally. Some children will experience periods of accelerated learning followed by plateaus in their development. Some may need more time than others to “roam in the known” before they make noticeable progress in their use of language. Teachers provide the type of supportive environment that enables learners to develop confidence and competence with language and its many uses.

SOME PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING TOP-DOWN PRACTICES ● Although classroom descriptions of whole language practices vary from teacher to teacher, some basic principles guide every teacher’s actions. For example, teachers believe that language serves personal, social, and academic purposes in children’s lives. Language therefore cannot be severed
from a child’s quest to make sense; language and meaning-making are intertwined. In addition, top-down teachers recognize that oral and written language are parallel; one is not secondary to the other. Language, whether oral or written, involves a complex system of symbols, rules, and constructs that govern the content and form of language in the context of its use. For the teacher, keeping language “whole” means not breaking it into bits and pieces or isolating the subsystems of language for instructional emphasis.

Respect for the child as a learner is paramount to a successful classroom environment. Top-down teachers believe that children are natural learners who learn how to read and write best under natural conditions. Because learning to read and write involves trial and error, top-down teachers hold firm to their convictions that children must learn to take risks in classroom contexts.

Classrooms are “communities” in a top-down curriculum. Teacher and students come together as a community of learners to engage in reading, writing, and other collaborative acts of meaning-making. Language learners help one another. They talk to each other about what they are writing and what they are reading. They engage in partnerships around projects and thematic studies. They share their understandings of how to solve problems encountered while reading and writing.

Although whole language has transformed the way many of today’s teachers think about and enact a literacy curriculum in their classrooms, educators and policymakers in the late twentieth century questioned the effectiveness of a whole language curriculum to develop skillful and competent readers and writers and called for its removal as a basis of reading instruction. Some called for a return to a skills-based curriculum. Others called for balanced instruction in which teachers drew on the best practices of both skills-based curricula and a whole language curriculum, embroiling educators in the so-called “Reading Wars” referred to in Chapter 1.

Today, we find ourselves still seeking answers to the same questions. The recent national efforts to identify key research on difficulties in learning to read (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and on best practices for reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) have become part of the enduring debate on how best to teach reading.

In the twenty-first century, however, the debate has continued to shift. Instead of arguing whether reading instruction should be phonics-based, whole language, or balanced, literacy experts currently debate what characterizes “scientifically based” reading instruction and what does not (Krashen, 2004; Lyon & Chhabra, 2004).

In addition, contemporary reading discussions focus on what have been coined the essential components of a comprehensive reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Reutzel and Cooter (2002) describe a comprehensive reading program as one that is “inclusive, research based, and meets the needs of learners so that no child is left behind” (p. 5). Although there is relative consensus that these components are important, discussion continues regarding how much and how to instruct children in each area, particularly with respect to those who struggle in reading (Allington, 2004). Regardless of where you stand on these issues, one thing is clear: Literacy experts continue to discuss, debate, and ask questions in the twenty-first century.

**CLASSROOM CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING**

Certain conditions for learning permeate classroom learning communities. These conditions have been described by various theorists and educators (see Goodman, 1986; Cambourne, 1984, 2001; Smith, 1989), and hold true to a top-down philosophy. However, we contend that these conditions are critical for all classrooms. Table 2.2 highlights ways to enhance student development in literacy learning.
All classrooms need to motivate children to read and write in authentic ways.

Must be immersed in written language. As learners, they need to engage in explorations of a wide range of texts, including those they produce by writing and those they use for reading.

Authentic texts may include children’s actual writings as well as books representing different literary genres. Books may be big or little in size, wordless or predictable. Genuine texts may also serve the functional, everyday needs of children and may include “environmental print” (street signs, posters, boxtops, labels), reference materials, textbooks, newspapers, and magazines.

Engagement suggests the learner’s commitment, mental involvement, and willingness to participate in a demonstration. Teachers create environments that reinforce the expectation that children will be successful and then provide the means for them to succeed.

Children take ownership for their own learning, but teachers play an important role in helping children assume responsibility for their learning. For example, teachers may plan and gather resources for a thematic unit, but they include their students in setting goals and making decisions about texts, activities, and patterns of participation.

Time to read and write also is essential. Children need time to engage in literacy events. Opportunities for reading, writing, speaking, and listening should occur throughout the day.

If children are to realize their potential as language users, they need time not only to read and write but also to respond and share what they are reading or writing.


Teachers and students alike demonstrate the role that literacy plays in their lives. Children need to encounter numerous demonstrations of reading and writing in use.
Instructional Approaches

Approaches to reading represent general instructional plans for achieving goals and objectives in a literacy curriculum. Instructional approaches respond to curriculum-related questions concerning content, methods, and materials in the teaching of reading. Skills-based curricula, for example, have spawned approaches to the teaching of reading that emphasize content, methods, and materials that are quite different from approaches associated with whole language curricula. When striving for a comprehensive program, teachers are likely to draw on their knowledge of different approaches in order to make decisions about instruction. Often, however, these decisions are consistent with teachers' beliefs about reading.

Several major approaches have dominated classroom literacy practice at various times in history and are still prevalent today. These include the basal reading approach, the language-experience approach, integrated language arts, literature-based instruction, and technology-based instruction. Figure 2.3 depicts these instructional approaches. No matter what approaches a teacher takes, each of the essential components of reading must be taught.

The Basal Reading Approach

Contemporary basal reading programs, a prominent approach to classroom reading instruction, are examined at length in Chapter 13. Teachers who traditionally use the reading lesson or story with a small group of students during a specified time in a regular location are most likely to use the basal reading approach. They constitute the majority in terms of numbers of classroom teachers around the country using a particular approach.

Most of today's basal programs contain both narrative and expository text that encompass a variety of genres. They now feature anthologies and journals while providing a scope and sequence of skills and strategies to be taught at various levels and
grades. Depending on your beliefs, basal instruction could be considered a bottom-up approach, presenting skills to be taught in a sequence, or an interactive program, featuring unedited children's literature selections, strategy instruction, and writing opportunities.

In addition to having scope and sequence charts, the basal reading approach outlines a standard lesson framework with slight variations in differing programs. The directed reading activity (DRA) is the common label for the lesson framework in basal series. Components of a basal lesson are discussed in Chapter 13 and are important because they are based on the assumption that students learn to read by reading, writing, and talking about meaningful topics. As a major approach to reading instruction, basal reading is easily observable in elementary classrooms in small reading groups. Basal reading, frequently described as eclectic, runs the gamut from word recognition skills to extended and meaningful reading, discussing, and writing.

The Language-Experience Approach

Teachers often use language-experience activities in combination with other approaches to reading instruction. However, the language-experience approach (LEA) is especially prevalent in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. We will examine LEA in more depth later in chapters related to emergent literacy and beginning instruction.

LEA is often associated with story dictation, recording the language of children on chart paper or newsprint and using what they say as the basis for reading instruction. There is more to LEA, however, than just recording the ideas of students after they have taken a trip to the school nurse or the zoo. LEA includes planned and continuous activities such as individual- and group-dictated stories, the building of word banks of known words, creative writing activities, oral reading of prose and poetry by teacher and students, directed reading–thinking lessons, the investigation of interests using multiple materials, and keeping records of student progress.

Stauffer (1970) and Allen (1976) have been strong proponents of LEA. Allen summed up the theory behind the language experiences from the young reader's point of view:

*What I think about, I can talk about; what I can say, I can write or someone can write for me; what I can write, I can read; and I can read what other people write for me to read.*

Teachers who subscribe to LEA have common viewpoints about children and their language. For example, they would probably agree that children's oral and written expression is based on their sensitivity to classroom and home environments. Further, they would support children working with their own language.

Thus the language-experience approach is based on the idea that language should be used to communicate thoughts, ideas, and meaning. How to use dictated stories and word banks, the directed reading–thinking procedure with comprehension strategies, and ways to extend children's writing and reading into more writing and reading are all examples of related instruction.

Integrated Language Arts

An integrated language arts approach to instruction extends the concept of language experience throughout the grades by immersing students in reading, writing, talking, listening, and viewing activities. Just as teachers believe that systems of language should not be separated and taught as isolated skills, so too do they believe that reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing should be taught in concert, not in separate lessons. In
this approach the language arts support one another and are connected through the use of informative and imaginative literature.

Teachers preserve the powerful bonds that exist among the various language arts by helping children make connections. The IRA/NCTE Standards for English Language Arts (1996) underscore the importance of preparing students at all grade levels for the literacy demands of today and tomorrow. Literacy expectations have accelerated in this century and are likely to increase dramatically in coming decades. When the process of developing national standards began, IRA and NCTE recognized that being literate means being active, critical, and creative users not only of printed and spoken language but also of visual language. The IRA/NCTE standards underscore the importance of integrating the language arts so that students will learn how to use language to think clearly, strategically, critically, and creatively.

Language is for learning. One of the more visible aspects of an integrated approach is the use of language as a tool for disciplinary learning. Teachers integrate language learning across the curriculum by organizing instruction around themes, inquiry-based project learning, and literature study. Various chapters throughout this book highlight the connections among the language arts, content area learning, and literature study.

Literature-Based Instruction

Literature-based instruction approaches accommodate individual student differences in reading abilities and at the same time focus on meaning, interest, and enjoyment. Veatch and Acinapuro (1966) designed a program for individualizing reading and articulated the how-to's of this approach. In literature-based instruction, teachers encourage their students to select their own trade books (another name for popular books).

In classrooms using literature in this way, children delight in the exploits of Curious George, Madeline, Encyclopedia Brown, and Harry Potter. The rationale is that an important part of classroom life should be reading: reading literature that makes children wonder, weep, laugh, shiver, and gasp.

Pieces of literature are used as springboards for writing. Children can write different endings for stories or incidents in their own lives that reflect conflicts similar to ones about which they have read. Students also look at story structures such as the repetitive structure in “The Three Little Pigs” and devise stories using the same kind of structure. Further, the conflicts between characters in literature can be used to help students gain insights into their own life situations. Students are encouraged to write about these also.

Self-selection of trade books or literature books is part of personalizing reading through the individualized approach. Teachers hold conferences with individual students about the books they are reading. Other forms of organization are also used. For example, a group of students reads and responds to the same piece of literature. Or students read different books with similar themes and then share and compare insights gained. Reading instruction delivered in this way emanates from assumptions about

In literature-based reading programs, students are encouraged to personally select their own trade books to read.
the reading process that are interactive and top-down. Literature-based approaches depend on teachers who know children's literature and classroom organization. These topics are discussed in Chapters 12, 13, and 15.

Technology-Based Instruction

Technology-based instruction approaches in today's schools can make a dramatic difference in children's literacy development. Computers have changed the way we communicate and disseminate information, how we approach reading and writing, and how we think about people becoming literate (Reinking, 1995, 1998). Learning to read with computers is becoming as commonplace in twenty-first-century classrooms as basal reading programs were in the twentieth century.

In the early 1980s, when computers began to play an increasingly important role in classrooms, computer-related technologies were primitive compared to the powerful technologies that are available today. The computer's potential for classroom learning revolved mainly around word processing and computer-assisted instruction (CAI). CAI programs in the 1980s included the use of drills, tutorials, games, and simulations. Some computer programs were engaging and interactive, but many weren't. Drill and tutorial software, for example, often provided students with dull, uninviting “electronic worksheets” to practice skills and reinforce concepts.

In the 90s, technology-based instruction changed the face of literacy learning and instruction. The development of the CD-ROM, for example, made learning to read with computers highly engaging and interactive. One example was the electronic, or “talking,” book, a digital version of a story. These books were readily available on CD-ROM and provide another way to support children's literacy development (Labbo, 2000).

Today, computers allow students to access and retrieve information, construct their own texts, and interact with others. The Internet is having a tremendous impact on classroom learning (Mike, 1996). Online opportunities can enhance student learning and be easily integrated into the classroom. E-mail allows students to have ongoing written correspondence with students from around the world. The Internet also provides immediate access to information on virtually any topic.

In addition, computers as word processors allow children to create texts that can serve as the basis for learning to read. As they become more sophisticated in the use of word processing programs, children become skillful in their ability to organize, revise, and edit what they write.

Palm Pilots and computer tablets are being used in classrooms today to store, retrieve, and send information between students and teachers. These tools are also used to address classroom assessment mandates because they provide ongoing assessment data to monitor student progress. Smart Boards (interactive whiteboards), Web cams, and electromagnetic LCD pen monitors are other technological advances changing the face of literacy instruction in the twenty-first century.

Approaches and Strategies in Comprehensive Instruction

Eclectic instruction, a teacher's use of a combination of approaches and strategies, is not self-defeating when it is grounded in teachers' understanding of theoretical and research-based principles from the knowledge base on reading and learning to read.
Instruction allows teachers to exercise flexibility in the use of approaches and strategies that are associated with different curricular perspectives. Effective teachers achieve a comprehensive literacy program by integrating reading and writing instruction throughout the school day. Weaving approaches and strategies into a seamless pattern of instruction is one of the hallmarks of a comprehensive literacy program.

Recent research supports the notion that highly effective teachers are an informative source of knowledge about exemplary literacy practices (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996a; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Rankin, Yokoi, & Ettenberger, 1996b). The research project, conducted by a team of researchers from the National Reading Research Center, investigated the nature of outstanding literacy instruction in primary classrooms. In a series of studies, the research team conducted surveys, interviews, and extensive observations of primary teachers who were considered by their supervisors to be outstanding teachers of literacy. As a result of the project, the researchers determined that highly effective first-grade teachers strike a balance between children’s immersion in literacy experiences and explicit instruction. The characteristics of highly effective literacy teachers include the thorough integration of reading and writing activities and the extensive use of instructional scaffolding to support the development of children’s literacy skills and strategies.

One of the important ways that teachers achieve a complete program is to scaffold instruction so that students become aware of and competent in the use of skills and strategies that they need to be successful. Used in construction, scaffolds serve as supports, lifting up workers so that they can reach areas they could not otherwise reach. The scaffold metaphor suggests helping students do what they cannot do on their own at first. Instructional scaffolding allows teachers to support literacy learning by showing students how to use skills and strategies that will lead to independent learning.

Instructional scaffolding means giving students a better chance to be successful with reading and writing. Teachers provide literacy scaffolds through the use of well-timed questions, explanations, demonstrations, practice, and application. These scaffolds provide instructional support for children in two ways: (1) the application of skills and strategies at the point of actual use during reading and (2) explicit instruction in the development of skills and strategies through minilessons.

Minilessons allow the teacher to provide explicit strategy instruction for students who need instructional guidance in the development and use of skills and strategies. The minilesson can be a short, unanticipated interchange between the teacher and students lasting a minute or two. Or it can be a planned lesson that may take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Minilessons, regardless of duration, allow teachers to share insights and knowledge that students might otherwise never encounter. See, for example, Box 2.2’s description of how Lauren Schultz uses minilessons to enrich her students’ reading, composition, and spelling skills. Explicit lessons create a framework that will unify skill and strategy development by making provisions for children to become aware of, use, and develop control over skills and strategies that can make a difference in their literate lives.

Explicit instruction helps students by providing an alternative to what we have called direct instruction in a skills-based curriculum. A direct instruction model, as we noted earlier, is rooted in behavioral principles of learning. Students are taught what to do, given immediate feedback, and afforded extensive practice until discrete skills become habitual and automatic in their use. Students seldom grasp the rationale or payoff underlying the particular skills that are taught.

When teachers make instruction explicit, however, students construct knowledge about the use of skills and strategies. Explicit instruction involves strategic learning, not habit formation. Minilessons follow a pattern that usually includes (1) creating awareness of the strategy, (2) modeling the strategy, (3) providing practice in the use of the
I teach reading, writing, and word study in a daily 80-minute literacy block. Reading and writing workshop alternate days, while word study is integrated in minilessons and direct instruction 2 days per week. Although days are labeled “Reading” or “Writing,” there is constant integration of both; in my classroom, reading and writing always go together.

I begin each literacy block with “status of the class,” a way of recording the number of pages students read the previous evening. This not only provides a quick check for accountability, but assessment data for independent reading. Using informal conversation, I comment on book choices and recommend future reading selections. This lets students know I am knowledgeable about the books they are reading.

I use minilessons to focus on strategies students can utilize to become good readers and writers. During minilessons, modeling of teacher thinking is crucial. My students keep notes from minilessons in a literacy binder. I use newspapers, magazines, novel excerpts, poetry, nonfiction texts, short stories, picture books, and teacher and student writing samples for minilesson text.

After the minilesson, students work independently for approximately 40 minutes. During reading workshop, students read independently, have a teacher conference, or participate in a guided reading or literature study group. Students choose independent reading books across genres and according to interests. Teacher conferences are held at least twice a month to evaluate how successful students are at applying reading strategies in their independent reading. Struggling readers often need more frequent conferences. Students participating in guided reading meet with me to discuss or respond in writing to the assigned text. Literature study is stressed in sixth grade and can consist of a group reading the same book, books by one author, or a certain genre. Reading journals are an integral part of the assessment process. Whatever a student is working on independently will be reflected on in their reading journals at least once a week. I work in a collaborative classroom, so my teaching partner is able to help me accomplish all this in such a short time period.

During the 40-minute writing workshop, students work on writing pieces and have teacher–student writing conferences. Sometimes students choose their writing topic, but other times they must write on a certain topic or in a particular genre. When needed, short-term guided writing groups are formed to support students struggling with a previously modeled writing concept. The writing process is directly modeled through minilessons and is a constant in writing workshop.

After independent work time, students present book talks, or we review the day’s minilesson. During the last 15 minutes of each class, I read aloud. I select novels or short stories that stretch the students’ ability to infer meaning and apply reading strategies. We often relate to the read-aloud as authors. This is great discussion time.

During word study, students are divided into four developmentally appropriate (fluid) groups. I meet with the groups on a rotating basis for approximately 20 minutes each. Groups are assigned group work and individual work to support their understanding. Spelling journals are used to record students’ knowledge concerning word patterns. Some groups have tests that focus on patterns and words they wish to learn from their writing or reading. This testing decision depends on the group and what they struggle to understand about words and how they work. Vocabulary enrichment is integrated for all students during reading and writing workshop.

The support students need to become successful readers and writers drives my instructional decisions. Our schedule often changes during the year to accommodate student needs and interests.

**Reflective Inquiry**

- How does Lauren’s program provide opportunities for children to read and write daily?
- How does Lauren provide explicit strategy instruction for students?
- What approaches described in this chapter contribute to Lauren’s overall program?
strategy, and (4) applying the strategy in authentic reading situations. Awareness of a
strategy often involves a give-and-take exchange of ideas between teacher and students.
These exchanges may include explanations and strategy tips and are built around ques-
tions such as “Why is the strategy useful?” “What is the payoff for students?” “How
does this improve learning?” and “What are the rules, guidelines, or procedures for be-
ing successful with the skill or strategy?” Students should come away from these dis-
cussions recognizing the rationale and process behind the use of the skill or strategy
under consideration.

Once students understand the what and how of the skill or strategy, the teacher
might want to extend a minilesson by modeling its use and providing students with prac-
tice. Modeling may include walking students through the steps and raising questions
about the procedures.

Notice how Gay uses modeling to engage students in “process discussions” and to
scaffold students’ use of strategies.

Gay: Before we begin reading our story today, I’m curious about something.
How important are words when you’re reading?
Natalie: Words help you make sense.
Gay: That’s right! But how do we know when the words in the story make
sense?
Natalie: They just do. When the words make sense I understand what I’m reading.
Dusty: You put what you know with what the author tells you and then you just
“get it.”
Gay: Yes. When you read for meaning, you’re “getting it”; what you’re reading
is making sense. What are some of the things that good readers like you
do when they come to hard words that they don’t recognize?

Chris: We fix our mistakes.
Gay: Sure you do; that’s because you know that reading has to make sense. If it
doesn’t, then you have to fix it. What else?

Tia: I make pictures in my head when I’m reading.
Natalie: We take risks.
Gay: And what do you mean by that, Natalie?

Natalie: I’m not afraid to try hard books.
Gay: What other kinds of risks do you take?

Jessica: We aren’t afraid to try hard words. I try [to identify a word] before I ask
for help.

Anna: If I don’t know a word, I try to figure it out.
Gay: And how do you do that, Anna?

Anna: Lots of ways. I try to sound it out or figure it out by using the clues in the
story; or I just skip it if I can’t still figure it out. Sometimes I just ask some-
one if it’s really bothering me.

Gay: Anna, all of those ways are called “strategies.” The important thing is that
reading has to make sense. We’ll learn even more strategies you can use as
the year goes along.

The hallmark of comprehensive instruction is the integration of reading and writing
experiences with scaffolded instruction in the use of skills and strategies. Skills and strate-
gies are best learned through meaningful use. When students are engaged in meaningful
and authentic reading and writing activities, there are numerous opportunities to scaffold
their literacy experiences.
Remember how Katie, the beginning teacher who opened our chapter, was confused about her theoretical orientations to reading? She exhibited confusion and inconsistency in her teaching. Now read how Gay, the veteran teacher we just met, aligns her classroom instruction with her philosophical beliefs about how children learn to read and write. Gay is confident with her philosophy, methods, and beliefs.

Gay’s gift wasn’t what she had expected. Her mother’s Christmas present in years past had always been unusual, but this year the woman had outdone herself. Wrapped in shiny foil, much to Gay’s surprise, was a worn-out, overstuffed, red-covered notebook. There it was—Gay’s old red notebook, which she hadn’t seen for more than 20 years—reunited once again with its owner.

Between the covers of the red notebook were those wonderful, creative, misspelled stories that Gay had written as a child. She was about 8 years old when she penned her first story, “Hankie and the Hawk.” Story after story filled hundreds of pages now yellowed with time. And then the idea struck her. Gay could hardly wait to get back to the students she taught and share her childhood stories with them.

Since then, Gay introduces “the old red notebook” to her students on the opening day of each school year. In her own words, “the book” has become the centerpiece of a strategy she uses to introduce her third-grade class to reading and writing: “Here I am, starting the morning of the first day of the school year by reading stories to my class that sound like something the children would have written. The book is falling apart, the pages are yellow, and the crazy teacher is grinning like a fool! Soon, however, an ‘ah ha’ or two can be heard as I read the author’s name with each story: ‘Hankie and the Hawk’ by Miss Gay Wilson, April 3, 1957; ‘How the Pig Got a Curly Tail’ by Miss Gay Wilson, December 10, 1959; ‘Sue’s Birthday’ by Miss Gay Wilson, February 21, 1958.

“The dates and the name Wilson carry little meaning, but a few of my students recognize the name Gay as mine and soon catch on to what’s happening. ‘These are stories you wrote when you was a little girl,’ blurts a precocious listener. The looks on the children’s faces are worth their weight in gold. Sheer delight!

“They beg for more, and I promise more another day. There are enough stories to read every day for most of the school year. So I make a promise to them that I will not break: ‘Every day this year you’ll get to read, and every day this year you’ll get to write.’ I want them to feel the specialness of this promise. Then we discuss the author in each of them.

“What do we do next? Write, of course. Do any of the children say, ‘I don’t know what to write about?’ Not at all. Of course, not all of them do write; some, on the first day, draw. But all the children approach writing with confidence. What do they do next? Read, of course. Since I read to them what I had written as a child, they now read to one another.”

First days are important. Why did Gay make the decision to use her childhood writings on the first day of school as an instructional tool? “It was a natural decision to make,” says Gay, “because I believe strongly in my role as a model. What better way to model what it means to be an author and a reader than to use my own childhood stories?” So the old red notebook became part of a strategy—a plan of action—designed to build community, set expectations, and contribute to a classroom environment that supports a literacy program.

In this chapter, you learned about the importance of a comprehensive approach to reading instruction. There are many variables to be taken into consideration as teachers strive to meet students’ needs. Instruction evolves from teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about reading and learning to read. Gay’s story closes this chapter because it illustrates how a teacher’s beliefs about learning to read and write influence what she does in the classroom.
How does Gay’s “old red notebook” strategy build a learning environment that contributes to a complete literacy program? We raise this question to guide your search for what it means to achieve a classroom literacy program that employs a variety of instructional approaches. As a third-grade teacher, Gay’s goal is to immerse students in authentic literacy experiences. But she also attempts to balance these experiences with explicit teaching in the skills and strategies that her students need to use to be successful readers and writers. Teachers like Gay recognize that skills and strategies are learned best through meaningful use.

What About Struggling Readers and Approaches to Literacy Instruction?

There are no “quick fixes” for students who find learning to read and write difficult. However, students who struggle can benefit from a literacy program that is grounded in teachers’ understanding of research-based principles. In comprehensive programs, children are engaged in authentic reading and writing activities daily, and have many opportunities to receive specific instruction in their area of need. Guided reading and writing groups naturally address struggling readers because they are small groups formed to target areas of need while allowing the student to be part of a community of learners. The teacher provides a scaffold for these groups, by constantly modeling strategies effective readers employ. Shared reading and writing activities also scaffold instruction and address the needs of nonreaders and English Language Learners by allowing them to take part in important experiences they might not otherwise be able to accomplish on their own. These are the types of activities that are built into a balanced literacy program to help students become competent readers and writers. Knowledgeable teachers who use flexibility in their approaches and strategies achieve balanced literacy programs that benefit all students.

Summary

An underlying assumption in this book is that when teachers are in touch with their beliefs about reading and learning to read, they are in a better position to balance literacy instruction in the classroom. When you analyze your beliefs, connecting what you practice with what you know and believe, you are better able to understand what you do and why. The reading autobiography suggested in Chapter 1 lends itself to a narrative inquiry that helps teachers discover some of the events and experiences that contribute to the development of beliefs and attitudes related to reading and learning to read. In this chapter, the Beliefs About Reading Interview and the TORP survey were suggested as tools that also permit teachers to inquire into their beliefs.

We explored two predominant curricula, one founded on a bottom-up perspective and the other on a top-down perspective. We showed different instructional approaches
to reading. These approaches include basal reading programs, language experience, integrated language arts, technology-based instruction, and literature-based programs.

Teachers enact curricula in varied and complex ways, based on their perspectives of the reading curriculum, the particular context in which they teach, and the desire to achieve a complete literacy program.

**Teacher Action Research**

1. Is there someone you now work with, a teacher who stands out in the school in which you are interning, or a fellow classmate, who you believe has a comprehensive literacy program? Describe the teacher and his or her literacy program. Organize your description of this teacher with the following: (a) background information including some personal history, (b) beliefs about reading, (c) the school context, and (d) how he or she balances literacy instruction.

2. Interview and observe a teacher who uses a literature-based approach to reading instruction. How does the teacher encourage children who don’t want to read? Describe how the teacher keeps track of what each child is reading and the child’s reading progress. How does the teacher encourage children to respond to what they read?

3. Interview a teacher who uses technology in the classroom. How does the teacher make use of the Internet? Is technology used to differentiate instruction? If so, how? How does the teacher use other technologies, such as Web cams or white boards?

4. Interview a fellow student using the Beliefs About Reading Interview (Box 2.1). Analyze the person’s implicit theories of reading as suggested in this chapter. If there is time, ask her or him to interview another classmate and form a small group to compare the various responses.

**Related Web Sites**

*The Whole Language Umbrella*

**www.ncte.org/wlu**

The Whole Language Umbrella is a support group for teachers who embrace a whole language philosophy. This is a useful site for learning more about whole language beliefs.

*North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)*

**www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li300.htm**

NCREL explores critical issues online in a multimedia document that synthesizes research using technology to enhance literacy instruction. It sets goals and an action plan and provides examples of schools that have succeeded in using technology in this way.
ReadWriteThink
www.readwritethink.org
This partnership between the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the Marco Polo Educational Foundation works to provide educators access to high-quality practices and resources in reading and language arts instruction.

Learning to Read: Resources for Language Arts and Reading Research
www.toread.com
This Web site is devoted to improving the quality of reading instruction through the study of reading. It serves as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of reading research.

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA)
www.ciera.org/library/instresrc/principles/index.html
CIERA is a national center for research on early reading. It features ten research-based, downloadable principles for improving reading achievement.