
Foreword

Anyone who thinks it is easy to teach reading needs to read this book. It places in clear relief that reading is a multifaceted activity. Teaching reading requires attention to every facet of reading development, as well as closely assessing how children's skills are evolving to ensure that instruction constantly matches their needs. First, children need to know the basics—that the scribbles on pages represent sounds which add up to words which add up to sentences, that they read from left to right, and so on. They need to develop phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words.

Reading also requires knowledge and experience. Most of us would have no difficulty reading the words in an article on astrophysics, but few of us would be able to make any sense of what we had “read,” just as a child who is unfamiliar with baseball might have difficulty making sense of a story about a baseball team. Vocabulary is also important, as well as an understanding of grammatical structures. Most of us can get the gist of a text, even if we don't know one or two words. But consider the child who is not familiar with many of the words, including words central to the topic of the text. For many children, the problem is not in decoding the words, it is in making sense of them. This is especially true for those children who come to school with English as a second language.

Indeed, language and reading skills are fundamentally related, yet much of what is written on reading has little to say about its connection to language development. This book integrates the two, making clear the importance of developing academic language to enable students to read texts in the disciplines they encounter in school. We now recognize that reading, science, math, novels, and poetry require different kinds of knowledge and vocabulary, and an understanding of different genres of writing and styles of discourse. Like it or not, teachers of all disciplines are reading teachers.

Students also need to develop the *metacognitive* skills required to make sense of text—identifying key concepts and ideas, making appropriate inferences and connections with previous knowledge, assessing comprehension, and so on. These strategies do not come naturally to most children. They need to be taught, and teachers need to know how to teach them.

Effective teachers need knowledge of the processes involved in reading and the academic language in the domain in which they are teaching. Moreover, they have to know how to *teach* all the various aspects of reading. Just as important, they need to know their students' current skills along the various dimensions to select appropriate materials and provide appropriate guidance to enable students to take their skills to the next level. What makes the task particularly challenging is the inevitable range of skills in a classroom of students. Whatever the class, students will vary in their experiences, vocabularies, content knowledge, use of comprehension strategies, and in the early grades, decoding skills.

Assessment, therefore, is a critical part of effective teaching. Indeed, teaching reading or any discipline without continuous assessment makes little sense. Alison Bailey and Margaret Heritage understand the importance of ongoing, formative assessment. In this book, they explain how formative assessment is different from other kinds of assessment and they provide a comprehensive and detailed account of how it can be woven into any instructional program that involves reading. To make concrete the strategies they recommend, they provide many real-life applications of formative assessment, including verbatim exchanges between teachers and students, which illustrate teachers' reasoning and inferences about student learning in oral language and reading.

The book is based on the best research on reading and language development and gives readers an opportunity to see nationally renowned experts' advice in their own words. But rather than a dreary summary of research findings, this book brings alive knowledge from decades of reading research by providing detailed descriptions and illustrations of the practical implications for classroom teaching.

While the book reminds us how difficult teaching is, it comes to our rescue by providing the kind of support teachers need to do it well. In all respects, the authors of this book practice what they preach. They highlight vocabulary that may be new to the reader, and they provide definitions and many examples that illustrate the concepts they introduce. They help make the concepts useful by illustrating them with vivid applications of the strategies being implemented in real classrooms. And they

provide tools (e.g., for assessment) that teachers can use in their own classrooms. The authors also reassure readers who might be intimidated by the complexity of the task that they don't have to figure it all out in a day or even alone. Just as teachers slowly and surely lead their children to being proficient readers, this book provides scaffolding and a suggested system of schoolwide support for teachers to develop their skills as reading teachers.

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