

## READING FUNDAMENTALS: Foundational Research

Within the Reading Fundamentals framework, there are opportunities to read to students (mentor texts), to read with students (shared texts), and to have students read independently (books or texts at their independent reading levels).

During the Interactive Read-Aloud phase, teachers read mentor texts aloud, thinking aloud and modeling how readers interact with text in order to make meaning. The Interactive Read-Alouds serve to build schema for the next phase of learning, the Mini-Lessons.

The Mini-Lessons revisit and examine the specific strategies previously introduced during the Interactive Read-Alouds. In the Mini-Lessons, teachers return to the mentor texts and/or use shared texts to focus on a single skill and engage and guide students as they practice this skill together. This modeling and guided practice enables students to begin to independently apply the strategies taught.

Independent practice and application takes place after each Mini-Lesson.

The ultimate goal is for students to understand how and when to use various strategies as they read a variety of texts on their own.

Reading Fundamentals Units of Study are grounded in research-based best practices and proven teaching strategies and techniques.

### **INTEGRATION OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION WITH CONTENT AREA SUBJECT MATTER (SOCIAL STUDIES AND SCIENCE) AND THE STUDY OF GENRE:**

Each Reading Fundamentals Unit of Study integrates reading skill and strategy instruction with the study of genre (characteristics and features) and/or content area subject matter (science and social studies).

“Teachers who provide comprehension strategy instruction that is deeply connected within the context of subject matter learning, such as history and science, foster comprehension development. . . . [T]he NRP evidence suggests that teaching such reading strategies as questioning, summarizing, comprehension monitoring, and using graphic organizers facilitates reading comprehension. Several quasi-experimental investigations show

that when the strategy instruction is fully embedded in in-depth learning of content, the strategies are learned to a high level of competence (Guthrie, Van Meter, Hancock, Alao, Anderson, & McCann, 1998). If students learn that strategies are tools for understanding the conceptual content of text, then the strategies become purposeful and integral to reading activities. Connecting cognitive strategies to students’ growing knowledge of a content area enables students to both increase their awareness of and deliberately use the strategies as means for learning (Brown, 1997) in microgenetic analyses of instruction. Unless the strategies are closely linked with knowledge and understanding in a content area, students are unlikely to learn the strategies fully, may not perceive the strategies as valuable tools, and are less likely to use them in new learning situations with new text” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2004, p. 730).

“Teaching a variety of reading comprehension strategies in natural settings and content areas leads to increased learning of the strategies” (International Reading Association, 2000, p. 13).

“Researchers and practitioners have suggested that teaching students how to comprehend text while teaching content (e.g., science, social studies) may help them increase their reading proficiency and content area knowledge (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Morrow, Pressley, Smith, & Smith, 1997; Palincsar, Collins, Marano, & Magnusson, 2000; Reutzel, Smith, *Content Area Literacy: Individualizing Student Instruction in Second-Grade Science* 475 & Fawson, 2005; Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009)” (Connor et al., 2010, p. 474).

“The ability to gain knowledge from text is a critical one in this information age. Students need to develop the ability to understand the languages of disciplines like mathematics, history, and science. Furthermore, they need to develop the critical reading abilities associated with thinking like a mathematician, historian, or scientist. The need to not only understand information but also evaluate it is a necessity in today’s world” (Moss, 2005, p. 49).

“Literacy learning is consciously embedded throughout the curriculum in the whole school day (Collins & Shaeffer, 1997; Dunn, [B]each & Konto, 1994, Fingon, 2005). Literacy activities are purposefully integrated into the learning of content-area subjects such as art,

music, social studies, science, math, and play. Equal emphasis is placed on teaching reading, writing, listening, and oral language, because all help to create a literate individual” (Morrow & Dougherty, 2011, p. 6).

“Domain knowledge, or deep knowledge about a particular topic, requires long-term immersion in an area of study. This critical form of prior knowledge about a content area enhances vocabulary understanding as well as comprehension. As Hirsch (2003) noted, ‘If we don’t know the domain, we can’t construct a meaningful model of what’s being said’ (p. 17). By developing children’s domain knowledge at the elementary level, we help to ensure later success with the increasingly demanding texts found in content areas at the upper grade levels. Furthermore, reading instruction that provides an indepth, long-term focus on a specific knowledge domain not only improves general vocabulary but also improves reading fluency and motivation (Guthrie, Anderson, Alao, & Rinehart, 1999)” (Moss, 2005, p. 49).

“Implicit within the content of subject-matter texts, which teachers expect students to read, lie the reading processes (or skills and strategies) students need to comprehend the material. The point in giving content prominence over skills and strategies is to emphasize that we do not equate instruction in content area reading with teaching reading as a separate, or pull-out, subject. Isolated comprehension instruction is neither effective nor facilitative in developing students’ independence in reading and responding to content materials” (Alvermann & Eakle, 2003, p. 23).

“Integrating reading and content instruction throughout the elementary grades can help children learn to read at the same time they read to learn. At the primary level, instruction in reading to learn can parallel instruction in learning to read. Such interactions can prevent the decline in achievement that often occurs when students encounter the demands of reading to learn in the intermediate grades” (Moss, 2005, p. 50).

“At the upper elementary level, all too often, teaching students the process of reading informational text takes a back seat to teaching content. Many experts feel that the standards movement has exacerbated this situation through its emphasis on content coverage and testing. Despite its challenges, such teaching can actually streamline instruction by allowing teachers to address

literacy standards along with specific content area standards within particular lessons, thereby enhancing literacy along with content learning” (Moss, 2005, p. 50).

“By reading information trade books aloud, for example, teachers can expose children to the language and structure of exposition at the same time they engage them in learning content. Read-alouds also provide students with exposure to the language of a discipline, thereby increasing student domain knowledge. Through shared and guided reading experiences, teachers can help students develop awareness of the many ways that expository text differs from narrative and the importance of text features such as headings, tables of contents, indexes, maps, graphs, charts, and so on (Kristo & Bamford, 2004)” (Moss, 2005, p. 52).

“Students who can recognize story structure have greater appreciation, understanding, and memory for stories. In story structure instruction, students learn to identify the categories of content (setting, initiating events, internal reactions, goals, attempts, and outcomes) and how this content is organized into a plot. Often, students learn to recognize story structure through the use of story maps. Story maps, a type of graphic organizer, show the sequence of events in simple stories. Instruction in the content and organization of stories improves students’ comprehension and memory of stories” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 44).

“Using various genres of text (i.e., narrative and informational text) diversifies instructional opportunities, as assessed by teacher and student discourse. A knowledge of text structure is an important factor in fostering comprehension. Students with some knowledge of text structure expect texts to unfold in certain ways. Even before they enter school, children have a rudimentary sense of narrative structure. The first texts they are introduced to in school are narrative in structure, which allows an easy transition from oral to written language (Van Dongen & Westby, 1986). In school, children are also introduced to expository text, which is more complex, diverse, and challenging” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2004, p. 731).

“Readers who are unaware of structure do not approach a text with any particular plan of action (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). Consequently, they tend to retrieve information in a seemingly random way. Students

who are aware of text structure organize the text as they read, and they recognize and retain the important information it contains” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2004, p. 731).

### EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS

Reading Fundamentals Units of Study place great emphasis on interactive read- and think-alouds as a means of modeling reading skills and strategies, as well as integrate literacy instruction with genre and content area knowledge.

“No matter what side of the reading debate one is on, both sides agree that children need many opportunities to listen to texts read aloud by adults. The interactive read-aloud with accountable talk provides time for the students to listen to and talk about wonderful books that are most likely beyond their independent reading levels. Often early childhood teachers decide to begin the year reading picture books out loud, and then they move on to chapter books. During interactive read-aloud with accountable talk, the teacher models the work that careful readers do to comprehend texts and to foster ideas and theories about stories and characters” (Collins, 2004, p. 37).

“It has been stated that the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in literacy is reading aloud to children (Dennis and Walter, 1995: 140). There is no question about the multiple benefits a child derives from being read to. The various ways that oral reading can be optimized has been a focus of educational research for years” (Kouri & Telander, 2008, p. 330).

“Daily classroom read-alouds provide a versatile context for supporting a range of emergent literacy skills” (Zucker, Ward, & Justice, 2009, p. 62).

A recommendation for School-Based Educators: “Provide opportunities for teachers to read to students during the school day” (International Reading Association & National Middle School Association, 2001, p. 3).

“Read aloud is a daily practice in primary grade classrooms (e.g., Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta, & Echevarria, 1998; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998), but as the pressure to cover content

increases, fewer teachers make time for it as students move into the intermediate and secondary grades. Yet read aloud continues to provide valuable opportunities for modeling fluency and comprehension strategies, exploring complex ideas, building vocabulary, and increasing students’ world knowledge. It provides a scaffold for supporting classroom discourse. Moreover, students describe read aloud as a tool for developing better conceptual understandings (Ivey, 2003) and they report that they value the experience in school (Ivey & Broadus, 2001). When asked what they enjoyed most in class, 62% of sixth graders reported having their teacher read aloud. Again, the role of motivation must be acknowledged in considering an instructional framework for middle school students. Reading aloud to students—well beyond the point when they can read to themselves—provides a wide range of opportunities for modeling and supporting comprehension instruction in a format that students find highly engaging” (Wharton-McDonald & Swiger, 2009, p. 524).

“Because the teacher is doing the reading, children can concentrate on using strategies for comprehension and having accountable conversations about the text. The conversations that children have about the read-aloud texts serve as models and scaffold the kinds of conversations we want them to have with their partners during the independent reading workshop. The interactive read-aloud is a time when we can model for the children what they will be able to do themselves as readers in the not-so-distant future” (Collins, 2004, p. 37).

“Explicit strategy instruction is the intentional design and delivery of information by the teacher to students. The teacher models or demonstrates a skill or strategy and provides students with the opportunity to practice and apply the newly learned skills and obtain feedback (National Institute for Literacy 2008)” (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011, p. 5).

“Research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s supported the utility of explicit strategy instruction (Pearson and Dole 1987; Pressley et al. 1992). A recent large-scale evaluation found that implementation is often weak and erratic, however (James-Burdumy et al. 2009). Teachers appeared reluctant to think aloud for students, model use of comprehension strategies, and encourage students to use inferential clues. Classroom observations indicate that on average teachers used targeted strategies less

than once during 10-minute observation intervals (James-Burdumy et al. 2009)” (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011, p. 5).

“The panel is concerned that when comprehension skill instruction is present, teachers appear to be ‘mentioning’ a skill to students and ‘assigning’ it to them rather than employing the effective instruction, modeling, and transactional practices that research supports” (International Reading Association, 2000, p. 14).

“Research shows that explicit teaching techniques are particularly effective for comprehension strategy instruction. In explicit instruction, teachers tell readers why and when they should use strategies, what strategies to use, and how to apply them. The steps of explicit instruction typically include direct explanation, teacher modeling (‘thinking aloud’), guided practice, and application” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 45).

“More intensive instruction and modeling are more successful in improving reading and standardized test scores” (International Reading Association, 2000, p. 13).

“We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, to inspire. But in reading aloud, we also:

- condition the child’s brain to associate reading with pleasure;
- create background knowledge;
- build vocabulary;
- provide a reading role model” (Trelease, 2006, p. 4).

“One factor hidden in the decline of students’ recreational reading is that it coincides with a decline in the amount of time adults read to them. By middle school, almost no one is reading aloud to students. If each read-aloud is a commercial for the pleasures of reading, then a decline in advertising would naturally be reflected in a decline in students’ recreational reading” (Trelease, 2006, p. 4).

**SHORT SHARED TEXTS:** “Read-alouds do not always have to be whole books. They can be one or several passages from a chapter of a more lengthy text, including those intended for older audiences, as well as excerpts from magazines, newspapers, catalogs, and travel guides. When teachers share the things they have been reading for pleasure with their classes, they demonstrate

that they, too, are readers. Being a reader is a necessary ingredient to becoming a confident and successful writer” (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, pp. 22–23).

## GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

The teacher modeling and guided practice from the Interactive Read-Alouds and Mini-Lessons enable students to begin to independently apply the strategies taught. The goal of Reading Fundamentals is for students to understand how and when to apply various strategies as they read a variety of texts on their own.

“Highly effective K–3 comprehension instruction must include highly effective instruction; teach think-alouds; modeling; scaffolding; guided practice; independent use of processes so that students develop an internalized self-regulation of comprehension processes; a time for students to tell teachers what they need and want to learn to comprehend better; ample reading, vocabulary and decoding development; and, rich shared experiences with fiction, nonfiction, and technologically based texts” (Block & Lacina, 2009, p. 504).

“The rationale for the explicit teaching of comprehension skills is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading. Readers acquire these strategies informally to some extent, but explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding. The teacher generally demonstrates such strategies for students until the students are able to carry them out independently” (National Reading Panel, 2011, p. 14).

“In the gradual release of responsibility model, the focus lesson is the modeling phase. For a focus lesson to be effective, teachers must clearly establish a purpose and model their own thinking” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 4).

“Another phase of instruction occurs as teachers meet with needs-based groups. Guided instruction is almost always done with small, purposeful groups, which are composed based on students’ performance on formative assessments. A number of instructional strategies can be used during guided instruction. The key to guided instruction lies in the planning. These are not random groups of students meeting with the teacher. Instead,

the groups consist of students who share a common instructional need that the teacher can address” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 6).

“When collaborative learning is done right, our experience suggests that it is during this phase of instruction that students consolidate their thinking and understanding. Negotiating with peers, discussing ideas and information, or engaging in inquiry with others causes students to use what they learned during focus lessons and guided instruction. Importantly, collaborative learning is not the time to introduce new information to students. Rather, collaborative learning should be a time for students to apply information in novel situations or to engage in a spiral review of previous knowledge” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 7).

“The ultimate goal of our instruction is that students can independently apply information, ideas, content, skills, and strategies in unique situations. Our goal is not to create learners who are dependent on another person for information and ideas. As such, students need practice in completing independent tasks. To facilitate independent learning, the school and instructional events must be ‘organized to encourage and support a continued, increasingly mature and comprehensive acceptance of responsibilities for one’s own learning’ (Kesten, 1987, p. 15). Unfortunately, too many students are asked to complete independent tasks in the absence of good instruction that ensures that they have the background knowledge to do so. While there are a range of independent tasks that ensure students can apply information, our experience suggests that the more authentic the task is, the more likely the student is to complete it” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 9).

### **RESEARCH-BASED READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AND STRATEGIES EXPLICITLY TAUGHT IN EACH READING FUNDAMENTALS UNIT OF STUDY**

**DETERMINING IMPORTANCE, MAKING INFERENCES, AND SYNTHESIZING:** “About 8 million adolescents struggle with literacy in middle and high school, according to an expert panel of reading researchers (Biancarosa and Snow 2006). ‘Very few of these older struggling readers need help to read the words on a page; their most common problem is that they are not able to comprehend what they read . . . Obviously, the challenge is not a small one’ (p. 3). Until the 1980s,

teachers rarely taught reading comprehension (Carlisle and Rice 2002; Durkin 1978). Over the next 20 years, a large body of research emerged on methods for explicitly teaching reading comprehension to students in the upper elementary grades (Carlisle and Rice 2002). The goal of these methods is to teach students to learn from text—to discern which information is critical, integrate such information with what is already known, and draw valid inferences” (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011, p. 5).

**QUESTIONING:** “Teaching students to ask their own questions improves their active processing of text and their comprehension” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 44).

**DETERMINING IMPORTANCE AND SUMMARIZING:** “Summarizing requires students to determine what is important in what they are reading, to condense this information, and to put it into their own words” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 45).

**VISUALIZING:** “Good readers often form mental pictures, or images, as they read. Readers (especially younger readers) who visualize during reading understand and remember what they read better than readers who do not visualize. Help your students learn to form visual images of what they are reading. For example, urge them to picture a setting, character, or event described in the text” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 47).

**ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:** “Good readers draw on prior knowledge and experience to help them understand what they are reading. You can help your students make use of their prior knowledge to improve their comprehension. Before your students read, preview the text with them. As part of previewing, ask the students what they already know about the content of the selection (for example, the topic, the concept, or the time period). Ask them what they know about the author and what text structure he or she is likely to use. Discuss the important vocabulary used in the text. Show students some pictures or diagrams to prepare them for what they are about to read” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 47).

**MAKING CONNECTIONS:** “Effective teachers help readers make connections between texts they read and their personal lives and experiences” (RAND Reading

Study Group, 2004, p. 733).

**FIX-UP OR MONITORING STRATEGIES:** A kind of instruction that “improve[s] comprehension in non-impaired readers” is “[c]omprehension monitoring, where readers learn how to be aware of their understanding of the material” (National Reading Panel, 2011, p. 15).

**FINDING WORD MEANING (VOCABULARY):** “Vocabulary also can be learned incidentally in the context of storybook reading or in listening to others. Learning words before reading a text also is helpful. Techniques such as task restructuring and repeated exposure (including having the student encounter words in various contexts) appear to enhance vocabulary development. In addition, substituting easy words for more difficult words can assist low-achieving students” (National Reading Panel, 2011, p. 13).

“The scientific research on vocabulary instruction reveals that (1) most vocabulary is learned indirectly and (2) some vocabulary must be taught directly” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 29).

“Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words, such as words that represent complex concepts that are not part of the students’ everyday experiences. Direct instruction of vocabulary relevant to a given text leads to better reading comprehension. Direct instruction includes:

- providing students with specific word instruction; and
- teaching students word-learning strategies” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 30).

“They need to develop effective word-learning strategies, such as:

- how to use dictionaries and other reference aids to learn word meanings and to deepen knowledge of word meanings;
- how to use information about word parts to figure out the meanings of words in text; and
- how to use context clues to determine word meanings” (National Institute for Literacy, 2011, p. 32).

## IMPORTANCE OF FORMATIVE READING ASSESSMENTS

Every Reading Fundamentals lesson includes suggestions for formative assessments, including written and oral responses, inquiry, turn-and-talk, and conferences.

“Effective teachers of young readers monitor progress in reading by using informal assessments” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2004, p. 733).

“Every phase of instruction must be accompanied by a means of checking for understanding, beginning with the focus lesson. This is most commonly done through oral and written summaries. One way is to have them ‘turn to a partner’ to restate or summarize what they have just learned. We listen in to conversations and make notes on a transparency of what we have overheard. These notes are projected onto the screen, and we discuss the accuracy and completeness of the conversations (‘Anthony and Tre: Our classroom is a direct democracy because everyone has a vote, but our student council is a representative democracy because we elect leaders to vote for us’). This is an excellent way to find out what they understood—and misunderstood—which provides direction for the next lesson” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 37).

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