

Scaffolding Complex Text for English Learners

Timothy Shanahan
University of Illinois at Chicago
www.shanahanonliteracy.com



Current instruction emphasizes the teaching of reading skills

Decoding
skills

Cognitive
Skills



But something seems to be missing

Decoding
skills

?

Cognitive
Skills



Reading is more verbal than visual—
students must negotiate language

Decoding
skills

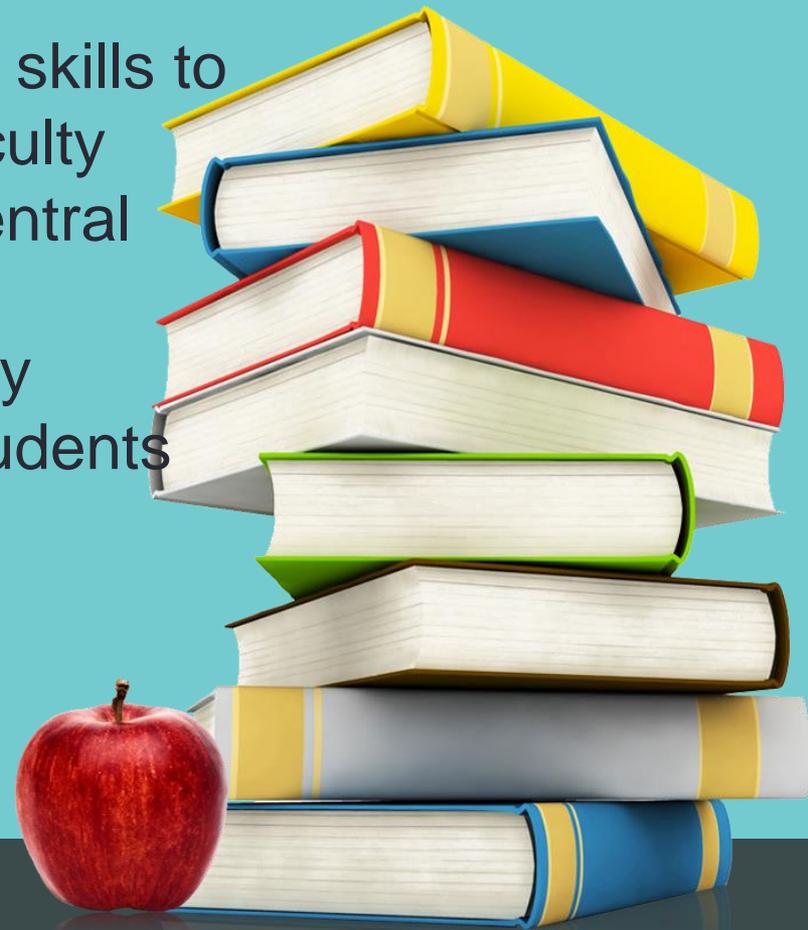
Language

Cognitive
Skills



CCSS shifts attention to skills in the context of reading complex text

- Past standards specified cognitive skills to be mastered, but ignored text difficulty
- New standards: Text difficulty is central to learning
- Standard 10 in grades 2-12 specify language complexity levels that students must be able to negotiate



Standards assign higher difficulty levels in grades 2-12

- ATOS, Degrees of Reading Power, Flesch-Kincaid, Lexiles, Reading Maturity, Source Rater
- Set higher than in the past” (75-89% comprehension to ???)

Grades	Lexile Bands	CCSS Bands
K-1	N/A	N/A
2-3	450L-730L	420L-820L
4-5	640L-850L	740L-1010L
6-8	860L-1010L	925L-1185L
9-10	960L-1120L	1050L-1335L
11-CCR	1070L-1220L	1185L-1385L

Standards assign higher difficulty levels in grades 2-12

- Set higher than in the past” (but not in grades K-1)

	Flesch-Kincaid	The Lexile Framework®
2nd – 3 rd	1.98 –5.34	420 – 820
4th – 5 th	4.51 –7.73	740 – 1010
6th – 8 th	6.51 –10.34	925 – 1185
9th – 10 th	8.32 –12.12	1050 – 1335
11th –CCR	10.34 –14.2	1185 – 1385

Four Common Classroom Responses to Text Complexity

- Move students to easier text
- Read text to students (communicates the information, but doesn't increase student reading ability)
- Tell students what texts say (same as reading to kids in its impact)
- Ignore the problem (more drawbacks than the previous approaches)



Studies show that matching texts to student levels doesn't improve achievement

- No studies of English learners
- Jorgensen, et al. (1977): no relation between placement and achievement gains
- Morgan, et al. (2000): frustration level placements led to greater learning gains
- O'Connor et al (2002, 2010): only benefit was for students reading at grade 1 level, but this benefit went away if scaffolding was equated
- Kuhn et al (2006): frustration level placement led to greater learning gains



Traditional instructional level theory

Instructional level theory: learning is facilitated by ensuring students can read instructional texts with relatively good fluency and comprehension; accomplished by placing students in relatively easy texts



Reader Level

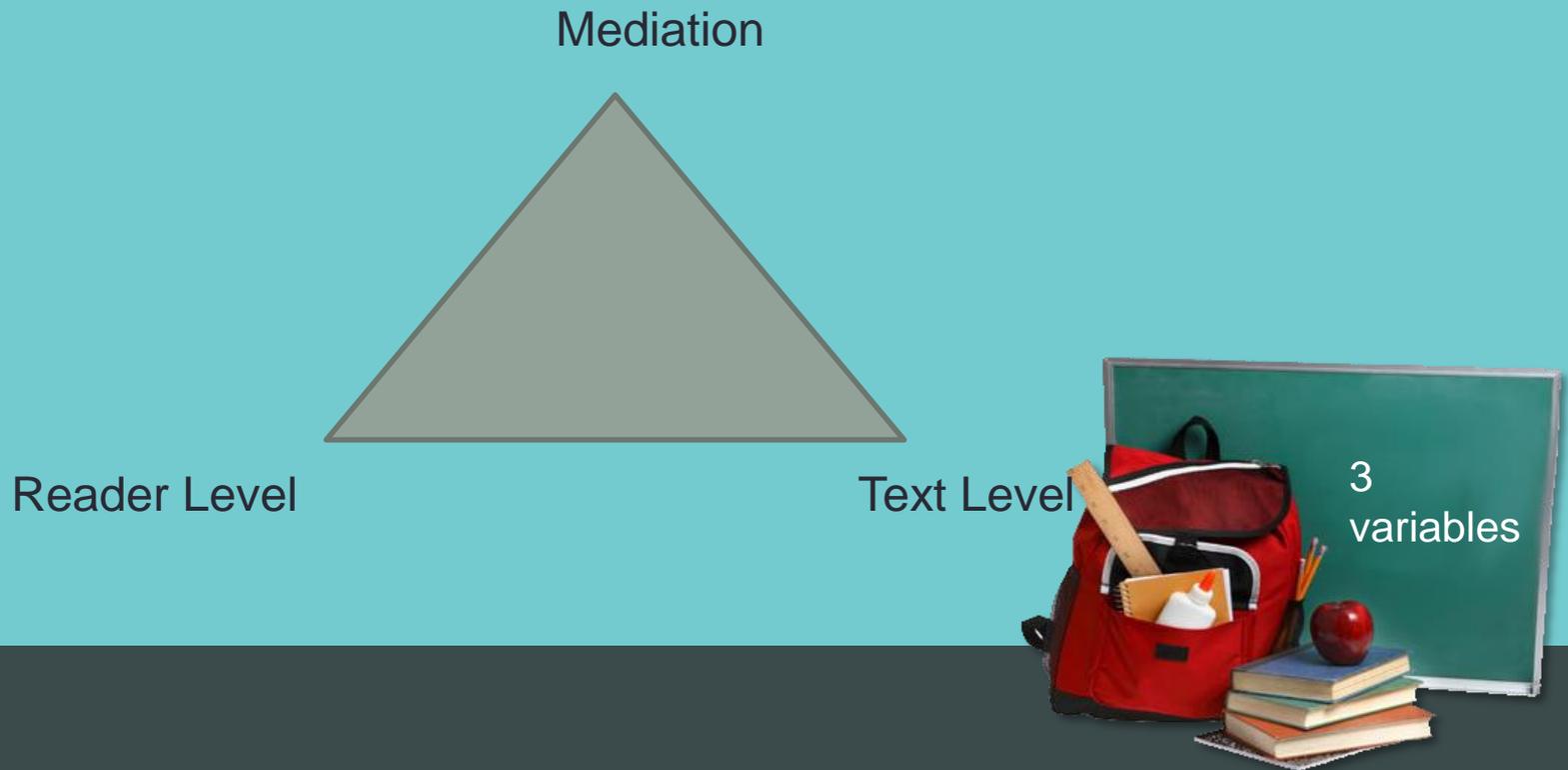


Text Level



Powell's mediated text theory

Learning from relatively harder texts is superior because teaching can facilitate/mediate students' interactions with text in ways that allows students to bridge the gap



Any evidence that this is possible?

- Yes, quite a bit
- Many studies show that – with scaffolding – students can read “frustration level” texts as if they had been placed in books at their “instructional levels”
- Remember the O’Connor studies: instructional level made a learning differences until she standardized the teacher scaffolding... that’s one



Scaffolding an Instructional Level

Bonfiglio, Daly, Persampieri, & Andersen, 2006

Burns, 2007

Burns, Dean, & Foley, 2004

Carney, Anderson, Blackburn, & Blessings, 1984

Daly & Martens, 1994

Eckert, Ardoin, Daisey, & Scarola, 2000

Faulkner & Levy, 1999

Gickling & Armstrong, 1978

Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005

Levy, Nicholls, & Kohen, 1993

McComas, Wacker, & Cooper, 1996

Neill, 1979



Scaffolding an Instructional Level

O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1985

Pany & McCoy, 1988

Rasinski, 1990

Reitsma, 1988

Rose & Beattie, 1986

Sanford & Horner, 2013

Sindelar, Monda, & O'Shea, 1990

Smith, 1979

Stoddard, Valcante, Sindelar, O'Shea, et al.,
1993

Taylor, Wade, & Yekovich, 1985

Turpie & Paratore, 1995

VanWagenen, Williams, & McLaughlin, 1994

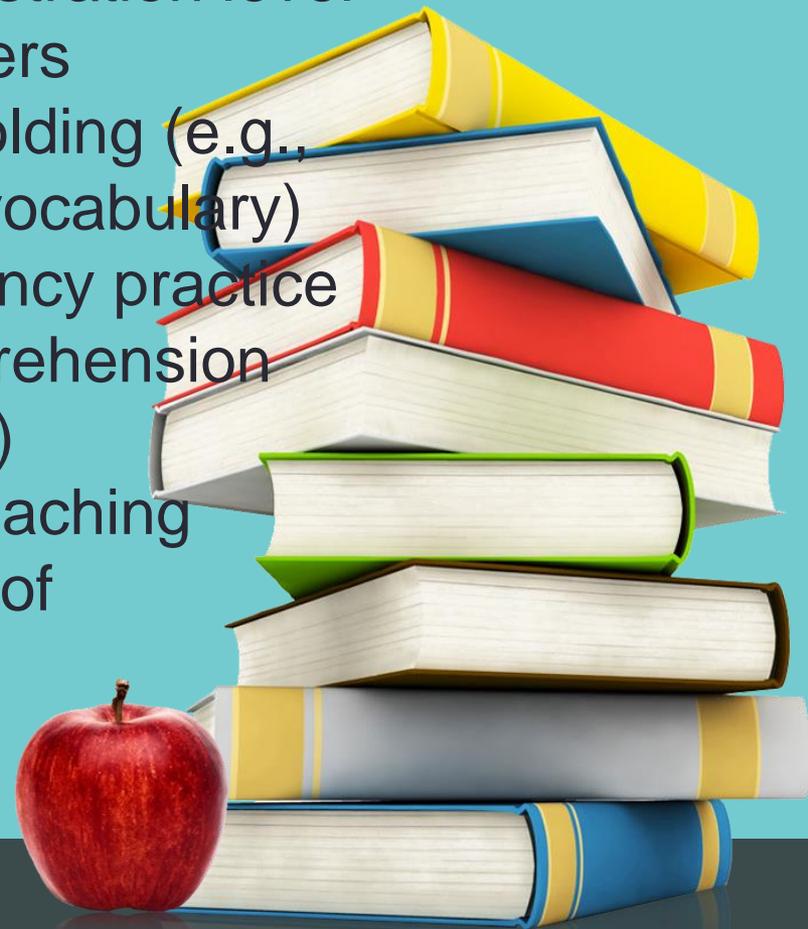
Weinstein & Cooke, 1992

Wixson, 1986



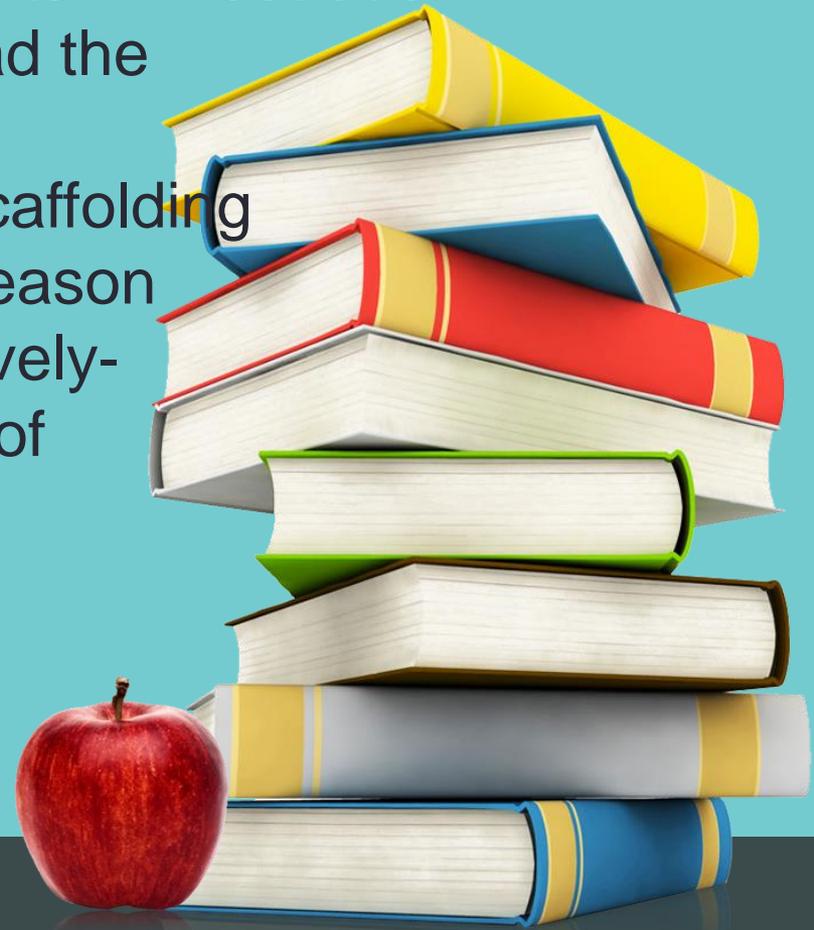
Summary of scaffolding studies

- 8 studies tested concept directly (7 multi-baseline studies) by raising frustration level performance for disabled readers
- These studies examined scaffolding (e.g., fluency practice, preteaching vocabulary)
- 14 studies of the impact of fluency practice on students' fluency and comprehension of the practice text (NRP, 2000)
- 3 studies of the impact of preteaching vocabulary on comprehension of the specific text (NRP, 2000)



What do these studies prove?

- That teachers can place students in "frustration level" texts and get them to read the texts as if they were at their "instructional levels" through scaffolding
- That means there is no good reason to hold ELLs back from cognitively-appropriate texts just because of lower reading levels



History of text scaffolding

- Most text scaffolding schemes have been aimed at beginning readers
- The idea has been to get reading started without telling kids what the text says
- Lots of schemes for doing this:



Beginning reading scaffolds

- Controlled vocabulary
- Linguistic readers
- Decodable text
- Language experience approach
- Illustrations
- Etc.



Scaffolding Challenging Text (beyond beginning reading)

Scaffolding Text Features

- Provide or prime prior knowledge
- Complexity of vocabulary
- Complexity of syntax
- Complexity of coherence
- Familiarity of genre demands
- Complexity of text organization
- Subtlety of author's tone
- Sophistication of literary devices or data-presentation devices

Other Approaches

- Provide sufficient fluency
- Use stair-steps or apprentice texts
- Teach comprehension strategies
- Motivation

Scaffolding prior knowledge

- Readers do not just take in information
- They construct it and filter it through their knowledge
- Research shows that increasing readers' relevant knowledge before they read or stimulating existing relevant knowledge improves comprehension
- However, practices like close reading discourage an emphasis on prior knowledge and many instructional practices are inconsistent with the research

Guidelines for emphasizing prior knowledge

- Don't overdo it.
- Respect the text.
- Provide info the author assumed.
- Excerpts create special prior knowledge issues.
- Try to deal with comprehension-relevant prior knowledge.
- Use multiple readings to address prior knowledge.
- Address prior knowledge before reading or between readings.
- Analogies are an effective way to use prior knowledge.
- Avoid stimulating prior knowledge if the text challenges it.
Consider cultural differences in knowledge and experience.

Prior Knowledge Example

Three men came to get their haircut, but Stanley barked at them. The barber looked at William. “Boy,” he said, “isn’t that your dog?”

“No,” he said. “He just followed me. He lives next door.”

“Well,” the barber said, “that dog is keeping people out of my shop. There are people here ahead of you, but I’ll cut your hair now.”

Telling vocabulary

- The most obvious problem in reading a text: “I don’t know the words”
- Preteaching vocabulary improves readers’ reading comprehension
- But we tend to overdo preteaching of vocabulary and we don’t always focus on the right words
- Focus on words that will affect comprehension

Which words would you teach?

I can never forget the scene that met us. Between us and the Barrier was a lane of some fifty yards wide, a seething cauldron. Bergs were calving off as we watched: and capsizing: and hitting other bergs, splitting into two and falling apart. The Killers filled the whole place. Looking downwards into a hole between our berg and the next, a hole not bigger than a small room, we saw at least six whales. They were so crowded that they could only lie so as to get their snouts out of the water and my memory is that their snouts were bottle-nosed. At this moment our berg split into two parts and we hastily retreated to the lower and safer floes.

Which words would you teach?

I can never forget the scene that met us. Between us and the Barrier was a **lane** of some fifty yards wide, a **seething cauldron**. **Bergs** were **calving** off as we watched: and **capsizing**: and hitting other bergs, splitting into two and falling apart. The **Killers** filled the whole place. Looking downwards into a hole between our berg and the next, a hole not bigger than a small room, we saw at least six whales. They were so crowded that they could only lie so as to get their snouts out of the water and my memory is that their snouts were bottle-nosed. At this moment our berg split into two parts and we hastily retreated to the lower and safer **floes**.

Which words do you teach?

Photosynthesis may sound like a big word, but it's **actually** pretty simple. You can divide it into two parts: "Photo" is the Greek word for "Light," and "synthesis," is the Greek word for "putting together," which explains what photosynthesis is. It is using light to put things together. You may have noticed that all animals and humans eat food, but plants don't eat anything. Photosynthesis is how plants eat. They use this process to make their own food. Since they don't have to move around to find food, plants stay in one place, since they can make their food anywhere as long as they have three things.

Which words would you teach?

Some scientists argued that these gases have heated up our atmosphere. They say global warming will **affect** our climate so dramatically that **glaciers** will melt and sea levels will rise. In addition, it is not just our atmosphere that can be polluted. Oil from spills often **seeps** into the ocean.

Guidelines for vocabulary scaffold

- Focus on words that make a difference in comprehending the text.
- Do not preteach words that are explicitly defined in the text.
- Do not preteach words that can be figured out from context.
- Do not provide extensive prior instruction—telling or providing a glossary is enough.
- Definitely teach “false cognates.”
- Follow up: reading should stimulate growth in vocabulary.

False cognates

Word	English definition	Spanish cognate
deception	trick or lie	disappointment
nude	naked	knot
bizarro	strange, weird	valiant
convenient	easy to use	suitable
lecture	speech, presentation	read
molest	to sexually violate	to annoy

Vocabulary

	Key Vocabulary Text Defined	Key Vocabulary Context Defined	Key Vocabulary Preteach
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

Help with Sentence Structure

- Texts may be hard because of grammar or syntax

Explain clearly using at least three different reasons or drawing three diagrams why McClellan lost the battle.

Explain clearly why McClellan lost the battle. Give at least three reasons or draw three diagrams.

Help with Sentence Structure

- Guide students to interpret complex sentences (clause and phrase analysis)
- In dense prose, help find the subject and verb:
“However, on August 24, 2006, the International Astronomical Union (IAU), a group of individual astronomers and astronomical societies from around the world, made an announcement.”
- *Complex punctuation, such as split quotes:*
“Where are you going,” Maurice asked, “I thought you were going to help Tony wash the windows.”

- *However,*
- *on August 24 2006*
- *the International Astronomical Union (IAU), a group of individual astronomers and astronomical societies from around the world*
- *made*
- *an announcement*

Who was the sentence about?
the International Astronomical Union (IAU)

Who are they?
*a group of individual astronomers and astronomical societies
from around the world*

What did they do?
made

Made what?
an announcement

When?
on August 24 2006

Another example

“The women of Montgomery, both young and older, would come in with their fancy holiday dresses that needed adjustments or their Sunday suits and blouses that needed just a touch—a flower or some velvet trimming or something to make the ladies look festive.”

--Nikki Giovanni (Rosa)

- 44 words
- 2 commas, 1 em-dash

Another example

“The women of Montgomery , ~~both young and older,~~ would come in with their fancy holiday dresses that needed adjustments or their Sunday suits and blouses that needed just a touch—a flower or some velvet trimming or something to make the ladies look festive.”

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Another example (Spanish speakers)

- One day, when he grows up a bit, Mickey will be a helping dog.

Another example (Spanish speakers)

- One day,
- when he grows up a bit,
- Mickey will be a helping dog.

Another example (Spanish speakers)

- One day,
- when he grows up a bit,
- Mickey
- **will be**
- a helping dog.

Another example (for Spanish speakers)

It's likely that the faucet is made from iron, the pipes are made of copper, and the basin is made from iron or clay.

Another example (for Spanish speakers)

It's likely that the faucet is made from iron,
the pipes are made of copper,
and the basin is made from iron or clay.

Another example (for Spanish speakers)

It's likely that the faucet is made from iron,
(It's likely) the pipes are made of copper,
and (It's likely) the basin is made from iron or clay.

Another example (for Spanish speakers)

It's likely
that the faucet
is made
from iron,
(It's likely)
the pipes
are made
of copper,
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(It's likely)
the basin
is made
from iron or clay.

Guidelines for scaffolding grammar

- Identify complex sentences and design questions aimed at assessing comprehension of those sentences
- Complex sentences: particularly long sentences, sentences with internal punctuation, dependent clauses, parentheticals, passive sentences, etc.
- Identify sentences that may be problematic for English learners (e.g., Spanish speakers tend to have difficulty with future tense, auxiliary verbs)

Help with Cohesion

- Texts can be hard because the relationships and connections may be unclear to readers
- This can be particularly difficult for second language learners because of differences in how gender is dealt with
- *The killer whale tosses the penguin into the air and generally torments its prey before it eats it*
- *The killer whale tosses the penguin into the air and generally torments the penguin before eating it.*

Meanwhile, the nebula continued to orbit the new Sun until it formed a large flat ring around it. Scientists call this ring a “protoplanetary disk.” The disk, or ring, was hottest where it was closest to the Sun, and coolest at its outer edge. As the disk swirled around the Sun, the Sun’s gravity went to work. It pulled and tugged at the bits of rock, dust, ice, and gas until they came together in clumps of material we now call the planets.

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Another cohesion example

- There were several roads near by, but it did not take her long to find the one paved with yellow bricks.

Another cohesion example

- There were several roads near by, but it did not take her long to find the one paved with yellow bricks.

Another cohesion example

- There were several roads near by, but it did not take her long to find the one paved with yellow bricks.

Another cohesion example

“Surely,” said John, like one who had lost faith in his memory, “he used not to sleep in the kennel?”
“John,” Wendy said falteringly, “perhaps we don’t remember the old life as well as we thought we did.”

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'I didn't know that Cheshire cats always grinned; in fact, I didn't know that cats could grin.'

'They all can,' said the Duchess; 'and most of 'em do.'

'I don't know of any that do,' Alice said very politely, feeling quite pleased to have got into a conversation.

Another cohesion example

‘I didn’t know that Cheshire cats always grinned; in fact, I didn’t know that cats could grin.’

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Guidelines for cohesion scaffolding

- Identify the repetitions, synonyms, pronouns (mark the text to show the connections)
- Identify the conjunctions (and, moreover, however, but, consequently, etc.)
- Spanish speakers have particular difficulty with abstract pronouns (e.g., one, any) and with gender markers (e.g., his, her, him, it)

Genre Guidance

- Genres express the intent of the writer (texts within a genre have similar communicative purposes), but they also have structural or lexical commonalities
- Narrative, procedural, expository, persuasive, descriptive (but many subgenres)
- Fiction: action-adventure, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction, science fiction, literary fiction
- Information (content, newspaper sections, structures)
- Make sure students know the communicative purpose

Genre practice

- What is the genre?
- What was the author's purpose?
- How will you make sure your students know that?

Guide Use of Text Structure

- Texts can be hard because they are organized in complex ways
- The structure of what is read can help students determine importance.
 - Need to make sure that students know common text organization schemes (description; compare/contrast; problem-solution; sequence; enumeration)
 - Need to guide students to use headings and subheadings can help students learn the scope and sequence of information
 - Need to examine particular texts to see if organization holds a special key to the meaning (like in a comparison text or problem-solution text) and to guide students to attend to this structure

Story Map

Setting :

Main Character:

Problem:

Internal Response:

Attempt:

Outcome:

Reaction:

Theme:

Guide Tone Awareness

- Author's tone expresses their attitude towards subject or audience
- Text can be hard because the author's tone might be subtle (it matters if a student expects the text to be literally correct, when the author intends to be satirical)
- Young children always expect a positive tone
- Help students to recognize the tone of the text (e.g., formal, informal, intimate, solemn, playful, serious, ironic)

And after a couple of minutes of that, people started looking at Ms. W., nodding their heads real hard, sticking out their chests, and saying out loud, “I think that’s a great idea” and “Yes, let’s have a guest reader today,” because they were realizing that maybe they could be the Guest Reader and Star Student of the Afternoon. They wanted to remind Ms. Washington that not only were they superb readers, but wonderful human beings, too.

Especially Calvin “Big-Headed” Faribault, who actually raised his hand, and I just knew it was to volunteer out of the kindness of his big, fat, big-headed heart.

--Ida B.

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Guide Awareness of Literary Devices

Literary devices allow a writer to show rather than just tell (they communicate ideas in aesthetically powerful ways)

- Alliteration
- Allusion
- Analogy
- Connotation
- Hyperbole
- Irony
- Metaphor
- Point of view
- Symbolism,
- Understatement
- etc.

Guide Awareness of Data Presentation Devices

Data presentation devices allow a writer to show rather than just tell (they communicate ideas in powerful ways)

- Tables
- Charts
- Three-dimensional projections
- Graphics
- Formulas
- Statistics
- Etc.

Resources

Shanahan, T., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2012), March. The challenge of challenging text. *Educational Leadership*.

Build Text Reading Fluency

- Texts can be hard because they demand more advanced reading skills than the students have
- Students need practice reading (orally) with accuracy, appropriate speed, and prosody
- Not round-robin reading (use these instead: repeated reading, echo reading, paired reading, reading while listening, etc.)
- Putting fluency first might make sense
- Parsing texts can be helpful

A Walk in the Desert

Sunbeams are flickering over the landscape as the sun rises. A kit fox heads for her den as another day in the desert begins.

Deserts are surrounded by other kinds of landscapes. Scientists call these different land zones biomes. All the plants and animals in a biome form a community. In that community, every living thing depends on other community members for its survival. A biome's climate, soil, plants, and animals are all connected this way.

A Walk in the Desert

Sunbeams/ are flickering/ over the
landscape/ as the sun rises./ A kit fox/ heads/ for
her den/ as another day/ in the desert/ begins./

Deserts/ are surrounded/ by other kinds of
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every living thing/ depends/ on other community
members/ for its survival./ A biome's climate, soil,
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Provide Stair-step Texts

- Texts can be hard because students lack sufficient background knowledge
- If students have multiple texts on the same topic that are at different difficulty levels,
 - easier “apprentice” texts can help students build background knowledge for the more difficult ones.
 - The overlap in important information should increase the likelihood that students will pay attention to it.
 - Should increase a student’s ability to independently deal with the information in the hard text

Repetition

- One of the most powerful scaffolds is also one of the most obvious—reading a text more than once makes it more accessible
- In the past, we tended to have students read a text a single time, but as the text challenge increases it is essential that we encourage students to read texts (and parts of texts) more than once to make sense of it
- This is an effective strategy, but it is expensive too (the idea is to become successful with these texts—which should make it possible to succeed with other texts later with less work)
- Explain this to students

Comprehension strategies

- Research shows that when students are active readers—that is, when they are actively trying to understand a text—they comprehend and remember more
- Comprehension strategies are a proven way to get students to think about the ideas in a text
- Summarization, questioning, monitoring, seeking particular kinds of information have all been found to stimulate learning

Motivation

- The instructional level is based on the idea that students seek easy work--that if the work is challenging they will stop trying
- But research shows that students seek challenge and are motivated by it
- Challenge only works if it is not overwhelming and if students see the possibility of getting better/stronger, et.
- Don't make challenging text a secret—tell kids what is happening and show them how you will make them effective
- Research also shows that students are interested in more challenging content (and on their own, they'll fight through more challenging text to get to this content)—using challenging text opens up content possibilities

The physical fitness metaphor

- If reading and physical exercise are similar, then text complexity is akin to weight or distance
- Students need to practice reading with multiple levels of difficulty and for varied amounts (these variations can even occur within a single exercise session)
- Guiding students to read text with support is like spotting for someone during weight lifting (you have to be careful not to do the exercise for them and you have to avoid dependence)
- Do not always head off the challenges, but always be ready to respond and support

16-Week Marathon Training Schedule

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
1	3	Rest	4	3	Rest	5	Rest	15
2	3	Rest	4	3	Rest	6	Rest	16
3	3	Rest	4	3	Rest	7	Rest	17
4	3	Rest	5	3	Rest	8	Rest	19
5	3	Rest	5	3	Rest	10	Rest	21
6	4	Rest	5	4	Rest	11	Rest	24
7	4	Rest	6	4	Rest	12	Rest	26
8	4	Rest	6	4	Rest	14	Rest	28
9	4	Rest	7	4	Rest	16	Rest	31
10	5	Rest	8	5	Rest	16	Rest	34
11	5	Rest	8	5	Rest	17	Rest	35
12	5	Rest	8	5	Rest	18	Rest	36
13	5	Rest	8	5	Rest	20	Rest	38
14	5	Rest	8	5	Rest	9	Rest	27
15	3	Rest	5	3	Rest	8	Rest	19
16	3	Rest	3	Walk 2	Rest	26.2	Rest	34.2