In the first section of this book, we provide a theoretical foundation and rationale for the remainder of the text. This section contains three chapters. In Chapter 1, we describe various conceptualizations of reading and writing. We use available theory and research to advance an interactive perspective on reading and writing that lays the foundation for the assessment and instruction process described in the book. In the final part of this chapter, we describe the legal and political aspects of special education and disability and implications for instruction.

In Chapter 2, we discuss the component skills and strategies required to succeed in reading and writing tasks. This chapter may be a review for some students taking a graduate course in assessment and instruction, but the information is essential for teachers and specialists to make sound decisions during assessment and to plan appropriate instruction. In addition, we discuss in detail how learner factors, text factors, and contextual factors interact to influence student performance in reading and writing.
Concerns about reading and writing instruction—and the number of children who are failing to learn—often dominate both public and professional conversation about education. Too often, these issues and what to do about them are argued from personal experience. One person favors a particular approach because it worked for her daughter. Others argue for a different approach because they themselves feel more comfortable with certain practices. Teachers, however, need to base their decisions on a broad base of data, looking for patterns and evidence of efficacy for many students. Sound decision making comes from a combination of personal experience and years of practice, along with information from empirical research, formal case studies, and structured observations.

Good teaching always involves adapting instruction to the needs of specific individuals or groups of students. Such essential adaptations are especially important when we are concerned, as we are in this text, with students who are not learning to read and write easily and well. These students require thoughtfully planned and executed instruction, fitted to their particular needs. What is needed for one “disabled” or struggling learner may be quite different from what is required for another to succeed.

How can we decide what to change, how do we need to adapt existing practice, and how can we help these students who have failed to learn when given exposure to the usual and customary instruction? To make decisions, teachers need to consider theories of learning and teaching, both scholarly and practical. As J. Dewey (1946, 1998) indicated, if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there, but those who teach without theories may follow the road that leads nowhere. In reality, all teachers have some sort of theory, whether they realize it or not. Sometimes called “teacher beliefs” (Anders & Evans, 1994) and sometimes “perspective” (Gutiérrez-Clellen, Pena, & Quinn, 1995), teachers’ theories about reading and writing are extremely important, because the particular theory a teacher holds determines, at least in part, what that teacher does in the name of reading and writing instruction. In fact, Robinson (1998) suggested that teachers generally hold “problem-solving-based theories.” In other words, they ignore some sources of data (e.g., some types of research) if the data do not address the problems they face or the settings in which they work.
In this chapter, we describe the ways in which existing views of reading and writing have influenced both assessment and instruction over the years and provide information that will help you refine your own theories of reading and writing. In addition, we trace the legal and political roots of programs designed to address the needs of students with reading and writing difficulties. These various perspectives help teachers reflect on their existing knowledge and beliefs, setting the stage for a more extensive discussion in Chapter 2 of an interactive view of reading and writing.

UNDERSTANDING READING AND WRITING

In this section, we describe the historical contexts in which reading and writing came to be viewed separately in education in the United States. This is followed by a discussion of more-recent cognitive and social perspectives that have resulted in added integration of reading and writing in educational theory and practice.

Historical Perspectives on Reading and Writing

The field of literacy education as we know it today began as reading instruction in the public school at the primary grade levels. Public schooling was seen as a way to provide a growing population with the foundations of good citizenship, and reading was the way for students to acquire common moral and political principles. The first public schools of the mid-nineteenth century gave instruction in reading brief biblical passages and other moralistic texts; later, primers offered secular patriotic readings with questions and answers for students to copy and recite (Clifford, 1984; Squire, 1991).

Writing at that time was considered less important than oral communication, because most citizens of the new nation had no need to write except to sign their names. Like reading, writing was thought to be a simple matter—a way to put into print words that would otherwise be spoken. All students needed to know for that simple translation was handwriting and spelling (Clifford, 1984; Russell, 1991).

After the Civil War, the growing commercial and professional class was divided into many separate communities. These communities were linked more by written texts—such as memos, reports, professional literature, and administrative records—than by geography or social class (Russell, 1991). The new professionals demanded that schools provide their children an education that would prepare them for roles in government, commerce, and the growing professions. The purposes for school literacy instruction expanded to serve the general population as well as the college-bound elite (Katz, 1987; Russell, 1991).

In 1894 a committee composed of university professors, professionals, and businessmen issued the Report of the Committee of Ten on public high schools. The report called for greater emphasis on English literature, because literature was seen as a vehicle for transmitting common values and “uplifting” ordinary citizens (Applebee, 1974). Following this report, a National Conference on College Entrance Requirements produced a list of core readings—a literary canon that dominated the entire high school English curriculum for decades (Applebee, 1974).
The Committee of Ten also set standards for written expression that were accepted throughout the country (Heath, 1991; Russell, 1991). As a result, schools and other public institutions began emphasizing standard English in writing as well as speaking; correct spelling and grammar thus became a focus of instruction. Classroom writing activities typically consisted of copying texts, underlining, circling, and supplying one-word responses (Clifford, 1989; North, 1987). Graded reading books that matched children’s age and ability level, first printed in 1836, became the norm by the late 1800s and established the pattern for the basal reading series still used today (Squire, 1991).

From the mid-1800s through the first decades of the twentieth century, a progressive philosophy of education gained influence among educators. The foremost progressive philosopher of education, John Dewey, advocated a public school system that functioned neither to preserve privileged traditions nor to prepare students for prevailing social conditions, but rather to improve students’ lives and create a society whose benefits accrued to all citizens (Applebee, 1974; Cremin, 1989). Dewey rejected the literary canon and instead recommended curriculum materials that had relevance to students. He promoted cooperation and group work in the classroom to encourage a free exchange of ideas and saw schools as learning communities (Applebee, 1974; Hendley, 1986; Russell, 1991).

The scientific movement arose as a counterinfluence on schools during the progressive era. One of the early educational psychologists, Edward Thorndike, developed scientific theories that led to the development of objective measures of student achievement. These measures were used to sort students into ability groups so that teachers could provide instruction suited to particular needs. This movement came to exert the same control that the literary canon once had on curriculum and instruction in the form of skills instruction.

In the last forty years, our understanding of how students learn and our approach to studying reading and writing have changed rather dramatically as a result of two newer ways of thinking about teaching and learning: the cognitive revolution and the “social turn” (Geertz, 1983). These two perspectives, described more fully in the next section, are important because they prompted researchers and educators to consider reading and writing together, rather than separately. In addition, they are the basis for the interactive view described in this text. In describing these perspectives, we are greatly indebted to the thinking of Hiebert and Raphael (1996), McCarthey and Raphael (1992), and Englert and Palincsar (1991).

Cognitive Information-Processing Perspectives on Reading and Writing

During the World War II period, computer technology suggested new ways to model mental processes that influenced our views of learning. The new cognitive scientists viewed computers and the mind as similar: active, self-monitoring systems for processing information. Information-processing theories have been used to develop several models of both reading and writing processes (for example, Gough, 1972; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

When an information-processing perspective is applied to reading and writing, three assumptions seem to operate: (1) reading and writing comprise a number of subprocesses used to perform specialized tasks; (2) readers and writers have limited capacity for
attention so that trade-offs occur across the subprocesses; and (3) competence in reading and writing is determined by the degree of attention needed to operate subprocesses—i.e., the less memory needed, the more efficient the operation (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992).

Like the computer whose components perform specialized functions that interact to complete a task, information-processing models divide reading and writing processes into subprocesses, each with a different function. For example, Gough (1972) proposed a model of reading as a linear, hierarchical process. The reader works from the smallest units of analysis (letters) to the largest (text meaning), and each level of analysis triggers the next, with the sum of these analyses adding up to meaning.

In contrast, LaBerge and Samuels (1974) described reading in terms of the component processes that relate to the functions of different types of memory: visual, phonological, semantic, and episodic. At the heart of their model is attention, the process that allocates the reader’s efforts to the subprocess or memory type needed for the task at hand. In this view, progress through the subprocesses may not be linear, because attention may be allocated to different memories in different patterns.

The information-processing perspective also includes interactive models (e.g., Rumelhart, 1977). Interactive models suggest that the processing of text is a flexible interaction among the different information sources available to the reader and that the information contained in “higher” stages of processing can influence, as well as be influenced by, the analysis that occurs at lower stages of analysis.

Information-processing models of writing are similar to those of reading. For example, Flower and Hayes (1981) described writing as consisting of three recursive phases: planning, in which writers set goals and make plans; translating, in which writers put ideas into written form; and reviewing, in which writers test the plans and translations. Similarly, Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Goelman (1982) distinguish between metacomponents, used to identify choices and make decisions, and performance components that allow writers to carry out their plans. Although these models differ in the division of tasks and specific definitions of the writing process, they share an emphasis on dividing the process into smaller components for analysis and description.

Information-processing theorists also use the computer metaphor to describe the limited capacity of readers and writers, who must often juggle several subprocesses at once (accessing background knowledge, organizing ideas, making decisions about relevant and redundant information, and monitoring). Just as the computer cannot attend to everything at once, humans also have limitations on their processing capacities. The cognitive juggling required for successful reading and writing performance is explained in terms of how much attention is actually necessary to engage in a given activity and how effectively individuals switch their attention to the process most useful for a particular task.

The term automaticity has been used to describe the way skilled readers’ subprocesses operate as instinctive routines (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). Initially, subprocesses such as decoding in reading and handwriting in composition demand so much of our attentional resources that higher-level processes cannot be employed. Eventually, however, lower-level subprocesses are mastered to the point of automaticity, and then new routines can be learned. Although not all subprocesses become automatic (comprehension and planning always involve some conscious attention), the more that do become automatic, the better able the reader or writer is to attend to more cognitively demanding activities.
Cognitive scientists investigating reading and writing can roughly be divided into those who adhere to an information-processing model of cognition and those adhering to the more recent constructivist model of cognition. The former conceptualize meaning as being transported from author to reader (e.g., Hiebert & Raphael, 1996); the latter (e.g., R. C. Anderson, 1977; Bransford, 1979; A. L. Brown, 1978) see meaning as being constructed by the reader based on information the reader already possesses (the reader’s schema) and the information provided by the text. The constructivist view fits well with the social perspectives we are about to describe, and together they constitute what is known as a sociocognitive view of reading and writing.

Implications. Information-processing models and research provide us with an increased understanding of reading and writing processes in terms of their components. These models also provide a better understanding of the knowledge base of skilled readers and writers. However, most information-processing models do not account for the variability that occurs in reading and writing as a result of a host of contextual factors such as the nature of the task, goals, purposes, and instruction. They also tend to overlook or dismiss larger social and cultural factors that influence an individual’s reading and writing performance.

There has been little effort to detail the specific links between reading and writing from within the information-processing perspective. Although there is some research from this perspective that deals with how reading and writing may be related (for example, Ehri, 1989; Shanahan & Lomax, 1986), information-processing theory sheds little light on how to encourage their development or on how less-successful or novice readers and writers become more skilled.

Social Perspectives on Reading and Writing

Recent social theories of language and learning suggest that meaning is not an individual construction, but a social negotiation that depends on supportive interaction and shared use of language. The assumptions underlying various social perspectives on reading and writing are quite different from those described above: (1) reading and writing are social and cultural phenomena; (2) knowledge is constructed through the individual’s interaction with the sociocultural environment; and (3) cognitive processes related to reading and writing are acquired through contextualized activity and assisted learning (Englert & Palincsar, 1991; McCutheqy & Raphael, 1992).

Sociocultural Nature of Reading and Writing. The societies or cultures within which we live, learn, and work determine how reading and writing are defined, instructed, and evaluated. For example, at the district level, curriculum decisions such as the choice of guided reading approaches versus structured basal reading programs influence the instructional and assessment practices of teachers.

At the school level, the principal’s and teachers’ beliefs about learning and teaching have an effect on practices that determine, for example, the extent to which diverse groups of students are accorded equal opportunities to learn. Culture also manifests itself in classrooms in the form of patterns of social interactions and the sets of rules or routines that guide teachers’ and students’ social exchanges. These routines develop in the participants
shared understandings about what it means to read and write, what “counts” as reading and writing, and appropriate uses of reading and writing (Dyson, 1999; Miller & Gadnow, 1995; Rogoff, 1990).

According to sociocultural theorists, the oral and written texts that students produce don’t stand alone. Instead, they must be seen as related to all the activity and experience that have gone before with that teacher and classroom. Books have been read, ideas have been exchanged, and social interactions have occurred, all of which influence the types of oral and written exchanges that happen subsequently (Cole, 1990).

Viewing reading and writing in terms of cultural practices means that we must understand the political and social, as well as cognitive, dimensions of literacy. When the classroom is viewed as a culture, we must be concerned with teachers’ and students’ beliefs about reading and writing, and the patterns of interactions occurring among students and between teachers and students, rather than with discrete activities. We must consider factors such as the ways in which reading and writing are represented to students and the occasions students have to participate as readers and writers within the classroom culture.

**Knowledge Construction through Interaction.** The social perspective on learning asserts that learning to think, read, and write are not individual, independent activities. Instead, the acquisition of such functions begins with the interactions of parent and child, among siblings and peers, or between teacher and students. The role of language and dialogue is critical, because it is through speech and social interaction that the learner acquires abilities such as reading and writing (Vygotsky, 1986).

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that from the early stages of development, people are involved in fundamentally social processes such as communication; later, in a schooling context, these processes are jointly performed and constructed by teachers and students as they cooperatively engage in dialogue. Processes that begin as social and shared become internalized in a second phase. In this phase, students’ performance is assisted by their own vocalized self-talk; social speech becomes internalized as egocentric speech.

Finally, in a third phase, the self-directing speech of the learner goes underground as it becomes “inner speech.” At this point, learners do not overtly vocalize or self-instruct, although self-talk may surface as the difficulty of the task increases. Learners do not simply take in information; they continually construct new, more complex meanings as they transform knowledge for application across a broad range of activities.

**Contextualized Activity and Assisted Learning.** Vygotsky (1978) suggested that cognitive processes are best understood as context specific and learned through practical activity. This implies that reading and writing instruction must engage students at all ability levels as participants in contextualized, authentic, and holistic activities. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the difference between what a child can do alone and what he or she can do with the assistance of a more capable other represents the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) in which instruction should occur. The concept of the ZPD assumes that a deliberate transfer of control from the more knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable person takes place.

How the adult or more knowledgeable person assists the student in taking control of a process is integral to social views of learning. Assisted learning and instruction have
been compared to a scaffold, in that it provides support but is also temporary and adjustable (Palincsar, 1984; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This educational scaffolding involves structuring tasks through modeling, explaining, questioning, and feedback until the learner can operate independently and is essential to learning in a social view of reading and writing.

**Implications.** Social perspectives on reading and writing address a number of the weaknesses identified in cognitive models. Specifically, they account for variations among cultures in literacy practices and in the ways students learn to read and write in different settings. They highlight the role of social context and bring our attention to the need to be sensitive to the values and practices of different cultural groups in schools. In addition, the focus on language as a cultural tool helps us understand how new learning is acquired and how important it is in developing new instructional strategies (McCarthey & Raphael, 1992).

Social perspectives emphasize that reading and writing are connected through their uses within the culture and through the role dialogue plays in the development of literacy. Although there is research on issues related to the role of culture in literacy practices and in cognition, little research has been done on the connections between reading and writing from this perspective. Although variable within the range of social perspectives, some do offer insight into literacy development and instructional practices that support increased learning among less-skilled readers and writers.

**An Interactive Perspective on Reading and Writing**

The interactive perspective on reading and writing described in this book is an amalgam of the cognitive information-processing and social views. It rests on several assumptions: (1) reading and writing are processes of constructing meaning; (2) the construction of meaning results from an interaction between the reader/writer and the context of the reading/writing situation; and (3) the interaction is dynamic, or variable, as a function of numerous reader/writer and contextual factors (see Figure 1.1). Meaning, in the form of skilled reading and writing performance, is generated from the interaction between the learner and the reading/writing context, and there are many factors that influence learners’ ability to comprehend and compose. A general discussion of this perspective is provided below.

**Construction of Meaning in Reading and Writing.** The interactive view acknowledges how development in reading and development in writing are interrelated. At both the word level (Bear & Templeton, 1998) and the discourse level (Tierney, 1992), writing informs reading and vice versa. An interactive perspective suggests that readers construct meaning when they comprehend in much the same way writers construct meaning when they compose. Meaning is created in the mind of the reader/writer as a function of the interplay between the cognitive information-processing abilities of individuals and the context of the reading and/or writing event. As with the sociocultural perspective, skilled performance is viewed as the ability to use reading and writing for personal, recreational, academic, and civic purposes.
The interactive view argues that both cognitive processes and socio-cultural aspects of context influence reading and writing processes and performance. Reader/writer factors that affect reading and writing performance and processes include prior knowledge of content, knowledge about reading and writing processes, and attitudes and motivation. Context factors include the setting for learning, the reading and writing curriculum, and the instructional methods, materials, and tasks employed. Each of these factors has been shown to affect how people approach reading and writing tasks and also how well they perform.

Dynamic Interactions. The term *dynamic* is used to indicate that reading and writing are variable processes, adapting to the specific demands of each particular reading/writing experience. Reading and writing ability are relative properties, not stable, static constructs. Each person may have a range of reading and writing abilities, depending on texts, tasks, and contexts. For example, we may be very good at writing friendly letters but do poorly at writing research papers, or we may devour romance novels with good comprehension but shudder at the thought of reading a book about the latest breakthroughs in physics.
Implications. An interactive perspective offers the most useful insights for educators working with less-skilled readers and writers. Indeed, Frankel, Pearson, and Nair (2011) have argued that it provides “the broadest possible framework for conceptualizing disability and pointing toward appropriate instructional interventions” (p. 222). From this perspective, the variability within and across individuals means that reading and writing performance is a function of what learners can and will do at any given moment. Appropriate instruction requires that we understand the variability that exists within and across individual learners. Issues of linguistic background, motivation, and/or cultural understanding and values are each as relevant as whether the learner can read sight words or understand punctuation. Instruction that takes these issues into account focuses on providing students with a rich and diverse selection of materials and opportunities for ample self-selection during both reading and writing. It also provides students opportunities to read and write for many different purposes.

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF READING AND WRITING

In this section, we turn away from theoretical perspectives and toward legal and political perspectives on the acquisition of literacy among students who are struggling. Reading has become a major topic of conversation and action in the political arena, with the initial emphasis on early reading expanding to an interest in adolescent literacy. The influence of policy on practice—at local, state, and national levels—has never been greater, and we examine here some of the activity surrounding these issues. In addition, because they influence literacy instruction so strongly, we consider the legal and social basis for present-day special education programs and describe the specific provisions for meeting existing legal requirements in that arena.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM, READING, AND LITERACY

Reading and literacy are at the heart of some of the most controversial debates about education. People care about how well students read and write. Some care about it because they are particularly concerned about reading and writing as the basis for most other learning. Others care about it because they view it as a general indicator of the health of public schools. Finally, some care about it because the methods of instruction may be emblematic of philosophical or personal orientations toward larger issues such as student-centered versus curriculum-centered learning.

We cannot, of course, take on all of these issues in this book. However, we cannot avoid them either. Many theoretical and pedagogical arguments are not new (see Lemann, 1997, and Mathews, 1966, for a discussion of the “reading wars”). Certainly, old arguments have been resurrected in the current debate. However, the contemporary version of the debate is also an argument about which knowledge counts (and to whom) and also about who will decide what counts.
To an extraordinary extent, the current debates are being conducted in state houses, legislative meeting rooms, and the halls of Congress. “This modern reform movement has been characterized by efforts to create new ‘policy instruments’ to elicit, encourage, or demand changes in teaching and learning” (Valencia & Wixson, 2000, p. 909). Whether by means of mandated assessments and standards, or teacher preparation requirements, teachers and teacher educators find their ability to make decisions influenced or constrained (see Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000; McGill-Franzen, 2000; Valencia & Wixson, 2004).

The attention given reading and writing policies and practices can have the positive effect of creating more-coherent programs, providing support for less-skilled and knowledgeable teachers, and helping everyone to gain clarity about a state or community’s shared goals. Depending on how policy is developed and implemented, it can also have the less positive effect of creating divisions among educators, promoting cynicism and distrust among the public, and calling into question the motives of the participants.

If they did not know this before, most teachers now understand that policies and practices can make a very big difference in the choices they have available to them. Political forays might seem distant from the classroom and from our work with individual students who are having reading difficulties. However, they do affect instruction at all levels in significant ways. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, there is a mandate for all states to have aligned standards and tests. NCLB has also increased testing accountability by requiring states to administer annual reading and mathematics assessments in grades 3 through 8. State assessments are referred to as “high-stakes” tests because they have significant consequences for districts, schools, administrations, teachers, and students. Administrators and teachers can be rewarded or punished based on student performance on these tests, which can also be used to determine if students are retained or fail to graduate from high school. Many individuals and groups have expressed concerns about high-stakes testing, such as those in a position statement adopted by the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association (IRA, May 1999). The IRA position states a particular concern that “testing has become a means of controlling instruction as opposed to a way of gathering information to help students become better readers” and calls for “the evaluation of the impact of current types and levels of testing on teaching quality, student motivation, educational policy making, and the public’s perception of the quality of schooling” (IRA, May 1999, p. 1).

NCLB has also influenced the nature of the programs or practices used to teach reading, primarily through its Reading First initiative. Commercial publishers shape their programs to accommodate both the intellectual and political debates. Teachers might find that they must use a particular program to teach a specifically mandated component of reading using a predetermined methodology similarly mandated. Tests that assess only limited aspects of reading competence encourage teachers to address a narrower range of reading behaviors.

In short, the policy perspective has moved into a central spot, governing (directly and indirectly) the decisions that teachers make every day. Debates continue about what types of text to use, whether students should be grouped or not, whether skills or literature should be taught, and whether to teach explicitly or implicitly. Over the years, these debates have triggered several significant attempts to specify the instructional imperatives for teaching
reading. One of the earliest efforts in the recent past was initiated by the National Academy of Sciences, which created a Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties and charged the committee to synthesize research on early reading and reading difficulties. In 1998, this prestigious group published *Preventing Reading Difficulties (PRD)* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Shortly following the PRD report, Congress charged the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education to establish a panel of experts to synthesize and summarize the research-based knowledge related to teaching children to read. The charge was controversial, largely because it conceived of research so narrowly that it excluded a large amount of worthwhile literacy research and limited the usefulness of the findings for classroom teachers. The resulting document, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of Scientific Research and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (National Reading Panel [nRP], 2000) was released amid significant debate (see, e.g., Garan, 2001; Shanahan, 2001). Despite the criticisms, the NRP report played a key role in federal reading policy and in establishing current reading standards and practices, primarily through the policies associated with the Reading First initiative (Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2004).

Following the attention to early reading came increased interest in reading comprehension and adolescent literacy. Attention to reading comprehension began with a research agenda-setting effort established by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by the RAND Corporation, which resulted in a volume entitled *Reading for Understanding: Toward an R&D Program in Reading Comprehension* (RAND, 2002), otherwise known as the RAND report. This report provided the impetus for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (now the Institute for Educational Sciences, or IES) to create a new program of research on reading comprehension. Most recently, attention has moved toward comprehension in the middle and secondary schools, as reflected in the report entitled Reading Next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The foreword to this report acknowledges that the country’s attention to reading in the primary grades, described as “word recognition,” has neglected “the core of reading: comprehension, learning while reading, reading in the content areas, and reading in the service of secondary or higher education. . .” and that “. . . many excellent third-grade readers will falter or fail in later-grade academic tasks if the teaching of reading is neglected in the middle and secondary grades” (p. 1). This report delineates fifteen elements aimed at improving middle and high school literacy achievement, and calls on the funding, research, policy-making, and education communities to embrace “these recommendations in an effort to meet the needs of all students in our society, while also strengthening our understanding of exactly what works, when, and for whom. We will hereby strengthen the chances for striving readers to graduate from high school as strong, independent learners prepared to take on the multiple challenges of life in a global economy” (p. 5). Shortly following the release of Reading Next, the U.S. Department of Education announced its Striving Readers grant program, which made its first awards in 2006. The goals of this program are threefold: (1) to enhance the overall level of reading achievement in middle and high schools through improvements in the quality of literacy instruction across the curriculum, (2) to improve the literacy skills of struggling adolescent readers, and (3) to help build a strong scientific research base around specific strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills.
The most recent entry into the long line of reports and policy documents is the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (CCSS-ELA), released in June 2010 by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA). Largely as a result of the tremendous variability across states with regard to standards, assessments, and proficiency criteria, there are renewed efforts to bring coherence to state standards and assessments in reading and mathematics. At this writing, forty-five states plus the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS, and a similar number of states have joined together in two consortia to develop new state assessments aligned with the CCSS for implementation in 2014–2015.

Throughout this book we describe more fully our own interactive perspective, one that we believe successfully accounts for a wide array of research findings and provides a place in the dialogue for a perspective that honors both the findings of research and the diverse contexts of teaching and learning in U.S. schools.

**LEGAL AND SOCIAL ROOTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

During the 1950s and 1960s, a combination of social and political factors combined to create an environment in which unusual and extensive attention was focused on students who were failing to learn easily and well in the public schools of the United States. National attention was captured by a series of legal battles initiated by a group of advocates who wanted to see that all students received appropriate public education.

One such legal battle was *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971), in which the court concluded that students had been excluded or excused from attendance in public schools simply because they were disabled and ordered the state to support public education for such students. As a result, any school-age child, no matter how impaired, was eligible to receive a free, appropriate public education for the first time in history.

Access to public education was only one of the problems confronting the field at that time, however. The practices surrounding testing and labeling students were suspect for many reasons. For minority students, the problems of abuses and inadequate protections were particularly apparent. Two other cases were directly related to practices in these areas. The decisions handed down by the court in *Diana v. Board of Education* (1970) and *Larry P. v. Riles* (which started in 1971 and concluded in 1979) required that the state of California test students in their primary language, reevaluate students from minority groups (African Americans, Latinos, and Asians) currently in classes for the mentally retarded, and develop and standardize IQ tests appropriate for minority groups.

A final concern among advocates in the area of special education involved the treatment and instruction provided to handicapped individuals once they were placed in specialized institutional settings. In two cases, *Wyatt v. Stickney* and *New York ARC v. Rockefeller*, judges ruled that residents of such placements had the right to appropriate treatment, and in the *Wyatt* case, the judge specified that this treatment should occur in the least restrictive environment.

The active round of legal rulings prompted both attention and concern and provided the basis for the legislative initiatives to follow. Beginning in the early 1960s, laws were passed that established federal programs related to service, training, and
research designed specifically for the handicapped. These legislative actions culminated with the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Act (PL 94-142) in 1975. Replaced by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 101-476, or IDEA) in 1990, it was further amended in 1997 (PL 105-17) and again in 2004 (PL 108-446). Taken together, these legislative actions define disability; describe the identification of students and the planning of instructional programs; and guide decisions about procedures for identification of, placement of, and programs for students with special needs.

Although Section 504 was actually passed before the other legislation, the regulations came out several years later, and many schools were slow to adopt the provisions of Section 504. On the other hand, all schools are well aware of the provisions of IDEA, which mandates the following:

- The right to education—all handicapped children are to be provided with free, appropriate public education
- The right to nondiscriminatory evaluation
- The right to an IEP (Individualized Education Plan)—a clear statement of objectives for each child, along with documentation of the child’s current and expected performance
- The right to education in the least restrictive environment
- The right to due process
- The right of parental participation (Gallagher, 1984)

Special Education Identification

The actual procedures for implementing the mandates of IDEA vary somewhat from community to community, but the process must include provisions for meeting each mandate. Practically speaking, a teacher, administrator, or parent may make an initial referral for the purposes of determining whether a student is entitled to special education services. Following this referral, the child’s parents must be fully informed about the prospective assessment process and permission to proceed must be received from them. Only after these stages have been completed are assessment procedures initiated to determine whether the student meets federal and local guidelines for exceptionality. In addition, the assessment is usually designed to determine the category of handicap that will be used for purposes of classification. For students identified as having a specific learning disability, the primary determining factor has been a discrepancy between their measured achievement and intellectual ability.

IDEA 1997 clearly specifies procedures for the assessment phase. The procedures designed to address the mandate that students have “the right to nondiscriminatory evaluation” are as follows:

- Tests must be selected and administered so as to ensure that results “accurately reflect the child’s aptitude and achievement . . . rather than reflecting the child’s impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills.”
No single testing procedure may be used for determining an appropriate educational program for the child.

The evaluation must be conducted by a multidisciplinary team.

The child must be assessed in all areas related to health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities. (See IDEA 1997 Regulations, C.F.R. § 300.532.)

In addition, the law provides guidelines for the types of assessment instruments that may be used, stating that tests and other evaluation materials

- should be provided and administered in the child’s native language;
- should have been validated for the specific purpose for which they are used;
- should be administered by trained personnel; and
- should include materials tailored to assess specific areas of educational need and not merely those that are designed to provide a single general intelligence quotient. (See IDEA 1997 Regulations, C.F.R. § 300.532.)

When the assessment phase is completed, IDEA 1997 states clearly that there will be a meeting to develop the child’s individualized education plan (IEP). As was previously noted, the IEP is mandated by the federal government and requires a clear statement of objectives for each child, along with documentation of the child’s current and expected performance. In addition, the IEP must contain a statement that specifies who will be responsible for each component of the plan and ensures periodic reevaluation of the child’s status.

IDEA 1997 regulations require that the multidisciplinary team involved in developing the IEP must include a public education representative who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education, a regular education teacher, the child’s teacher, one or both of the child’s parents, the child where applicable, and other individuals at the discretion of the parent or agency (see IDEA Regulations, C.F.R. § 300.344 [1977]).

The parent(s) must agree to the designation of the child under a particular handicapping condition and to the information provided in the IEP. If the parents do not agree with the recommendations of the team, a series of legal procedures are set in motion to settle the disagreement.

When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, it included a new approach for determining eligibility for learning disability services. This law indicates that schools will not be required to take into consideration whether a student has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability. Rather, they may use a process called response to intervention (RTI) that determines if the student responds to scientific, research-based interventions as part of the evaluation process. After receiving one or more such interventions, students who do not demonstrate adequate progress are then considered for an evaluation for a specific learning disability. According to a white paper by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE), RTI builds on recommendations made by the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) that children with disabilities should first be considered general education students and that special education should embrace a model of prevention as opposed to a model of failure (NASDSE/CASE, 2006).
Although some have been quick to instantiate the RTI concept with a particular, special education–oriented three-tier model, others have provided a broader perspective. For example, the NASDSE/CASE (2006) white paper stresses that, while RTI has been given a boost by IDEA 2004, “it is first and foremost, a strategy to be used in the general educational classroom” (p. 2). In addition, a paper on RTI by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), an organization representing eleven national and international organizations, emphasizes that there is no universally accepted model or approach to RTI and that many possible variations can be conceptualized (NJCLD, 2005). More recently, the International Reading Association’s Commission on RTI published a set of Guiding Principles for educators (IRA, 2009), with a particular focus on issues for professionals in the areas related to language and literacy education. These principles characterize RTI as a comprehensive, systemic approach to teaching and learning designed to address learning problems for all students through increasingly differentiated and intensified assessment and instruction. These principles emphasize the need for highly qualified professionals with appropriate expertise to deliver instruction. From this perspective, RTI is a process that cuts across general, compensatory, and special education, and is not exclusively a general or special education initiative. Similarly, it is not simply a prereferral process that must be carried out before students are identified as learning disabled. Carefully selected assessment and differentiated instruction, quality professional development, and genuine collaboration across teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents are among the factors described as important for the success of RTI.

**Students with Disabilities**

According to IDEA, a student’s eligibility for special education services is determined by the type and degree of deficit in a particular area, following the guidelines developed through legal and judicial channels. There are currently nine categories of special needs:

1. Mental impairment
2. Hearing impairment
3. Visual impairment
4. Speech impairment
5. Orthopedic impairment
6. Other health impairments (limited vitality, strength, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems)
7. Multiply handicapped
8. Serious emotional impairment
9. Specific learning disability

In most respects, the procedures and practical implications for students and schools are the same across IDEA and Section 504. All students who are eligible for special services under IDEA are also eligible for the protections of Section 504. However, Section 504 has a broader definition for eligibility, and some students may be eligible under Section 504 who would not meet the criteria for services under IDEA. Any student whose disability “substantially limits a major life activity or is regarded as a handicap by others”
may be eligible. Thus, students with certain medical conditions (e.g., asthma, allergies, communicable diseases) or students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, behavior problems, or drug or alcohol problems may require support under Section 504.

Eligibility for children in many categories is established early and unequivocally, because many handicapping conditions are apparent prior to a student’s entrance into school. However, learning disability and the less-severe cases of mental and emotional impairment are often identified after a student has entered school and failed to meet certain academic expectations.

Reading and writing personnel are often involved with students who have been identified as having special needs in the area of learning disability, because the referral is frequently made on the basis of a student’s academic performance in the area of reading and writing. “Over 75–80% of school-age students with mild disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, emotional disturbance, and behavioral disorders) experience significant problems in basic language and reading skills (Ellis & Cramer, 1994)” (quoted in Gaffney & Anderson, 2000, p. 71). Learning-disabled students currently account for approximately half of the children served through special education programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Learning disability is defined by the federal government in the following manner:

“Specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (Federal Register, Dec. 29, 1977, p. 65083)

It is important to understand how learning disability is related to other controversial issues surrounding reading and writing disability. For example, the similarity between the definition of learning disability and that of dyslexia offered by the World Federation of Neurology has not been lost on most educators:

[Dyslexia] is a disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity. It is dependent upon fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin. (Critchley, 1975)

These definitions suggest that for all practical purposes learning disability and dyslexia are synonymous. What is most important is that both definitions clearly imply either a medical or nonspecified etiology within the learner. As Spear-Swerling and Sternberg (1998) note, this intrinsic perspective has dominated the field of reading and learning disability for many decades. In this view, the students’ difficulties are seen as internal and intrinsic to the learner. The extrinsic perspective—drawing attention to the quality and nature of school experiences, poverty rate, or linguistic variations—has never taken root in the special education literature. The interactive view has only recently generated interest among educators and researchers in that field.
Impact on Practice

Although it may appear that special education determinations are straightforward, they are generally far from clear-cut. In addition, schools throughout the country are struggling to decide what programs to offer, who should deliver instruction, and who is eligible for various special programs. For reading and writing professionals and for students who need help in reading and writing, these issues can be troublesome. More than any other classification of handicap, that of learning disabilities has revived discussion about the source of disability. In the process, troubling sociological issues have been raised as well.

Initially, the “learning disability” category was most likely to be used in identifying affluent and middle-class students. As a result, these students received federally mandated support through special education. Disadvantaged students and those from diverse backgrounds were more likely to receive support (when they received any additional help at all) from the nonmandated compensatory education system.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was originally passed in 1965 and was conceived as a program to provide additional educational assistance (compensatory education) to schools with large numbers of low-income families. It has been revised and reauthorized several times since then, and continues to provide funding for services in eligible schools through Title I (originally Chapter I) programs. Title I services are available in many elementary schools in the country, serving approximately 25 percent of all primary-grade students (see McGill-Franzen, 2000). The most recent reauthorization of ESEA is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which makes eligible for Title I services any schools in which at least 35 percent of enrolled students or students in the attendance area are from low-income families.

More recently, researchers and educational policy experts have found that students from diverse backgrounds are disproportionately represented among both the special education and remedial populations (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Patton, 1998). This and other evidence supports the view expressed by Harry and Klinger (2006) that the use of disability categories is reliant on a variety of factors, which are influenced by social and political agendas of various states, groups, and individuals. What is important to realize is that these decisions to label students or place them in remedial programs have specific and serious instructional consequences. According to Au (2000, p. 840), “Students of diverse backgrounds, who tend to be categorized as poor readers, are likely to spend more time working on skills in isolation and less time actually reading and writing.”

Although several studies have challenged the efficacy of Title I programs (see Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Puma et al., 1997), there is also evidence that Title I can have a positive effect on the reading performance of students in high-poverty areas. The implementation of a model that permits school-wide classroom improvement projects rather than individual remediation and professional development for systemic reform appears to be central to success. Drawing on national data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 1996), McGill-Franzen (2000, p. 893) notes that, although still wide, “the achievement gap between Whites and minorities was reduced by one third during the (past) two decades, a time of increasing poverty for many families. This phenomenon has been attributed in part to federal educational interventions like Title I.”
Not surprisingly perhaps, students whose first language is not English also receive instruction within a confusing context of policy and practice. The first Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968, which was originally Title VII of ESEA, initiated experimental demonstration projects for educating language minority students from low-income families. The reauthorization of the BEA in 1974 eliminated the requirement that students must be below the poverty level to qualify for services, and the 1978 reauthorization expanded services to include students with limited academic proficiency as well as those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Importantly, these early versions required schools to attend to students’ native languages and cultures. Subsequent reauthorizations (1984, 1988, 1994) have not ensured that students receive appropriate instructional support and have directed resources increasingly toward English-only and/or transition programs. In the most recent reauthorization of ESEA, the NCLB Act of 2001, the BEA/Title VII was replaced by the English Language Acquisition Act under Title III of this legislation, which clearly stresses skills in English only.

Once again, the impact of these social and political influences on students’ opportunities to learn is significant (Garcia, 2000). As summarized by Crawford (1997, p. 7), the problem is a serious one: “A substantial minority of LEP children—estimates range from 22 to 30 percent—receive no language assistance whatsoever (Crawford, 1997; Donly, Henderson, & Strang, 1995; Moss & Puma, 1995). That is, as many as 1.1 million children, depending on which estimate of the LEP population one uses may be receiving no (English language instruction).”

Research has consistently demonstrated that students benefit from receiving early reading instruction in their native language (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cummins, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and the 1994 reauthorization of the BEA establishes “proficient bilingualism as a desirable goal, which can bring cognitive, academic, cultural, and economic benefits to individuals and to the nation” (Crawford, 1997, p. 1). However, strong opposition to bilingual education and a widespread advocacy for English-only schools has meant that “the political climate for bilingual education has never been chillier” (p. 2).

The existence of two or even three distinct systems for handling reading, writing, and language difficulties creates an environment in which cohesive planning and intervention are often impossible. In many schools today, there are both special education and literacy professionals (Title I or locally supported developmental-reading teachers) serving students with reading and writing problems. In addition, teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) students and English Language Learners (ELLs) often encounter students with literacy difficulties, but these teachers rarely interact in coordinated ways with the other professionals.

Although special programs can bring badly needed resources to schools and classrooms, there are costs associated with the potential benefits. Too often, classroom teachers see children in terms of the classifications used to get them help. The funds that are used to provide compensatory education are associated with high-poverty students, who are not infrequently seen as “educationally deprived” or “without background knowledge.” Similarly, ELLs have been viewed as “culturally deprived” or “linguistically deficient” (see Crawford, 1997). Finally, Coles (1978) argued many years ago that the “learning disabled” label is an example of “biologizing social problems.” By positing biological bases for learning problems, the responsibility for failure is put “within the head of the child”
rather than placed on the shoulders of schools, communities, and other institutions. “The classification plays its political role, moving the focus away from the general educational process, away from the need to change institutions, away from the need to appropriate more resources for social use toward the remedy of a purely medical problem” (p. 333).

In other words, the labels and classifications may encourage teachers to think that these students are no longer their primary responsibility. The cost to all of us may be greater than we realize. Allington (1994, pp. 104–105) suggests, “As schools have been expected to educate a greater proportion of children to increasingly higher standards of literacy, the regular education bureaucracy has put in place an increasing array of special programs and employed an expanding bevy of special personnel in attempts to minimize the roles and responsibilities of the regular education system in educating all children.” He further argues that it is this sense of regular education’s retreat from responsibility that has led the U.S. Department of Education to call for reducing exclusionary programs and set the stage for the current inclusionary education initiative for educating handicapped children (Will, 1986). This concern has also led to a shift in federal program guidelines indicating that the academic success of disadvantaged students is the responsibility of the whole school, not just the Title I program (LeTendre, 1991) or the bilingual program (August & Hakuta, 1994, 1997).

It is clear that the trend in the past ten to fifteen years has been to address the instructional needs of students with special needs within the mainstream classroom setting. Although the pace and the effort vary considerably, movements for full inclusion mean that many special education students now often receive their education in the mainstream setting (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995; Villa & Thousand, 1995). In addition, criticisms of pullout programs in Title I (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989; Slavin, 1989) have led to initiatives such as school-wide programs, Reading First, and RTI.

Although there is little doubt that neurological or constitutional dysfunction plays a role in certain cases of reading and writing difficulties, the percentage of cases accounted for by identifiable neurological problems appears to be extremely small (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1998; Vellutino, Scanlon & Sipay, 1997). In fact, it has become quite clear that effective instruction and intervention can significantly reduce the number of students who become learning disabled (Dorn & Schubert, 2008; Mathes et al., 2005; Scanlon et al., 2008). We believe that the majority of difficulties in reading and writing are more likely to result from a complex interaction between the learner and the reading and writing situation than from some form of pathology. It is this complex interaction to which we turn our attention for the remainder of the text.

**Pulling It Together: RTI from an Interactive Perspective**

There is no doubt that schools are serving an increasingly diverse student population with an increasingly diverse set of programs. This means that all teachers, whether “special,” “regular,” or “remedial,” need to consider individual differences among students. In addition, they need the skills and knowledge to work in multiple settings with other professionals. For many this means new roles and responsibilities. It is this perspective that is embodied within the response to intervention (RTI) approach to identifying students with learning disabilities under IDEA 2004, and many hope that RTI will provide the leverage necessary for this perspective to take hold in all educational settings.
It is our contention that the most effective assessment and instruction practices derive from interactive perspectives such as the one described here. This is entirely consistent with the perspective on RTI put forward in this book and by the International Reading Association but is not necessarily embodied in every approach to RTI. It is important to note that there are a number of different approaches to RTI, and the legislation does not specify any particular model or approach. In fact, the federal government purposely provides few details for the development and implementation of RTI procedures, stating specifically that states and districts should have the flexibility to establish approaches that reflect each community’s unique situation. This means that the most widely used models are neither mandated nor the only possible approaches to RTI.

RTI most frequently involves a multitiered approach to the implementation of instructional modifications. The number of tiers varies across approaches, but the most widely described models involve either three or four tiers. In the three-tiered approach, low-performing students are identified and monitored as they participate in their classroom, or Tier 1, core instruction. Core instruction involves some differentiation and is intended to accommodate at least 80 percent of the students in a given class, school, or district. Those who do not make sufficient progress in Tier 1 instruction receive a second, more targeted and intensive tier of instruction intended to accelerate their progress (Tier 2). This might be accomplished by providing more time in instruction, smaller instructional groupings, and/or alternative methods of instruction targeted to specific areas of students’ needs. Tier 2 instruction is intended to be provided in addition to the Tier 1 instruction and might be provided by the classroom teacher or a specialist in a small-group context. Students’ progress continues to be monitored, and an additional 15 percent of students are expected to succeed with this supplemental instruction/intervention. Those who do not demonstrate accelerated progress with Tier 2 intervention/s are considered for even more intensive and targeted intervention in Tier 3 and/or possible LD evaluation/classification.

Tiered models of RTI are frequently characterized in the literature as one of two types: standard protocol or problem solving. The standard protocol approach (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003) emphasizes standardized (often scripted) interventions used for a standard amount of time with teachers often monitored for “treatment fidelity” (Gresham, 2007). The problem-solving approach (Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003) involves collaborative efforts on the part of several members of the school community, to identify and implement optimal instructional interventions for each student who appears to be at risk for learning difficulties. Within this approach, a team of professionals assembles and develops an instructional plan designed to be responsive to the needs of the individual student. The student’s response to such interventions determines future intervention plans in an iterative manner.

Although differences are often noted between standard protocol and problem-solving approaches, many writers argue that these distinctions break down quickly and that “most RTI models described in the literature combine the two approaches... and probably function optimally when integrated into one three-tiered service delivery system” (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007a, p. 4). Indeed, writing from a problem-solving perspective, Burns and Coolong-Chaffin (2006) observe that “most Tier 2 interventions have a standardized component” (p. 6) whether they are focused on the needs of individuals or groups of individuals.
There are also important differences among standard protocol and problem-solving approaches that are often ignored in the literature. For example, both Reading Recovery (RR) (http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/) and the Interactive Strategies Approach (ISA) (Scanlon & Vellutino, 1996; Scanlon, Vellutino, Small, Fanuele, & Sweeney, 2005) have been referred to as standard protocol programs and described as “scripted” because there are consistent lesson segments (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gresham, 2007). However, these approaches are standard only to the extent that the teachers who provide the interventions have been trained in the approaches and can therefore plan and deliver instruction responsive to students’ needs by taking into account what students know and are able to do and considering the characteristics and expectations of the classroom curriculum. This is quite different from the highly prescriptive interventions typically used in most standard protocol approaches to RTI.

Johnston (2011) has proposed a way of thinking about existing approaches to RTI that captures the most important distinctions between them. He describes approaches in terms of their primary emphasis on either measurement or instruction, arguing that the basis for this distinction comes from the legislation itself. In particular, he notes that the RTI legislation has a dual focus that poses both a measurement problem (i.e., how to replace the IQ discrepancy identification strategy [300.307]) and an instructional problem (i.e., how to reduce the number of students who end up with serious learning difficulties, by guaranteeing “appropriate instruction” [300.309]).

When conceived as a strategy for accurately identifying students with disabilities, RTI is seen more as a measurement problem, emphasizing standardization—in timing, interventions, and assessments. Most standard protocol and problem-solving models can be characterized as measurement approaches. Proponents of this approach favor standard intervention packages, preferably scripted, to increase the standardization. This assumes that an intervention that is effective on average in one setting will be effective with each new student in any new setting if implemented with fidelity and increasing intensity. If the intervention is not successful, the student is the likely source of the problem (e.g., LD, treatment resister, chronic nonresponder), because research has already demonstrated that the instruction is “effective.” This is the perspective described by many special educators and school psychologists (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

When conceived as a strategy for preventing serious learning difficulties, RTI becomes an instructional problem, emphasizing optimal instruction for individual students and providing the means and context for improving teaching and teacher expertise. In this frame, assessment must be informative about the qualities of learning and teaching, giving direction to instruction. In other words, instruction is not “evidence based” unless assessment shows it is effective for the student in question. If intervention is not successful in such an approach, teachers would first look to the instruction as the source of difficulty, before the student. The attention given to RTI throughout this book should be understood within the context of this preventative perspective, which reflects the interactive view of reading and writing subscribed to here.

Using Johnston’s reasoning, Reading Recovery (RR) and Interactive Strategies Approach (ISA) are instructional approaches as opposed to standard protocol or measurement approaches. Neither program is scripted, and neither would work if it was scripted (Clay, 2005; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002). Suppose, for example, that during instruction a
child reads a word incorrectly. A scripted program would prescribe the teacher’s response. By contrast, in RR and ISA, the teacher’s response would depend on, among other things, the text difficulty, the instructional opportunity offered by the word, the context of the error, and the child’s current processing strategies. Monitoring the teacher for “treatment fidelity” would miss the adaptive teacher expertise taking place and risk discouraging the teacher from adapting instruction as needed. To be clear, however, interventions such as RR and ISA are not “anything goes.” Instead, they focus on developing teacher expertise, because research indicates that specific programs may or may not work for individual students.

In a measurement frame, the focus is on the design and selection of tests and packaged programs rather than the teacher’s ability to adapt instruction. Expertise is minimized by the selection of instructional packages, particularly scripted ones, and testing instruments that can be used by people with limited knowledge and/or experience. Consistent with Johnston’s classification scheme, scholars who promote measurement approaches describe RTI intervention as a test of whether the student is LD (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), whereas those who promote instructional approaches describe intervention as a test of the appropriateness of the instruction (Scanlon, in press).

In short, RTI is not a model to be imposed on schools, but rather a framework to help schools and teachers identify and support students before the difficulties they encounter with language and literacy become more serious. According to the research, relatively few students who are having difficulty in language and literacy have specific learning disabilities (Vellutino, Scanlon, & Tanzman, 1998). Many other factors, including the nature of educational opportunities provided, impact students’ academic and social growth. For example, teaching practices and assessment tools that are insensitive to cultural and linguistic differences can lead to ineffective instruction or misinterpretations in evaluation. It is the combination of an interactive perspective on reading and writing and the preventative perspective on RTI that is articulated throughout this book. An underlying assumption of these perspectives is that instruction/intervention can and will be effective for the overwhelming majority of students who are presently experiencing school/literacy difficulties.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter began with the idea that theories of reading and writing are important because they help us make decisions about assessment and instruction. We then suggested how reading and writing came to be treated separately in education and how the “cognitive revolution” and “social turn” have led to more-integrated views of reading and writing.

Cognitive information-processing perspectives on reading and writing were described as emphasizing subprocesses in reading and writing, readers and writers as limited-capacity processors, and speed of processing. This view has increased our understanding of reading and writing processes in terms of their components and the knowledge base of skilled readers and writers but cannot account for the variability in performance that occurs as a result of a host of social and cultural factors.
Social perspectives on reading and writing were described as emphasizing reading and writing as social and cultural phenomena, knowledge as constructed through the individual’s interaction with the sociocultural environment, and the acquisition of cognitive processes as related to reading and writing through contextualized activity and assisted learning. Social perspectives were seen as addressing some of the weaknesses observed in information-processing views and as helpful in formulating pedagogical goals and strategies for reading and writing.

The interactive view of reading and writing that serves as the basis for this text was characterized as an amalgam of the information-processing and social views. This perspective suggests that reading and writing are processes of constructing meaning through a dynamic interaction between the reader/writer and the context of the reading/writing situation. This means that reading and writing are not static, but vary as a function of contextual factors such as setting, curriculum, and instructional conditions and reader/writer factors such as background knowledge, motivation, and interests. These interactions are described more fully in Chapter 2.

The second section of this chapter described the legal, social, and political influences on reading instruction and briefly discussed the contemporary issues related to reading instruction. We began this section with a discussion of the relations between education reform efforts and reading education that linked pivotal research syntheses and the interactive view put forward in this text. We then described the legislative and legal bases for programs designed for students with special needs, including compensatory education and special education (e.g., IDEA, Section 504, and ESEA/Title I). The provisions and protections in IDEA for the rights of all handicapped children were noted, and the procedures for implementing these provisions were discussed, including recent changes to the methods schools are permitted to use in identifying students with learning disabilities (RTI). We presented criticisms of these “entitlement” programs—special education, Title I, and bilingual education—as mechanisms for minimizing the roles and responsibilities of regular education in educating all children. Responses to these criticisms have led to reforms such as the inclusionary education movement in special education, the RTI approach to identifying students with learning disabilities, the move to school-wide programs in Title I, and the reauthorization of ESEA as the NCLB Act of 2001, which included Reading First as part of Title I. Although these reforms are not without their own critics, they have all come about as a means of better addressing concerns about poor reading achievement, especially among marginalized and underserved populations.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of different perspectives on RTI and their relation to the interactive view of reading and writing that is the basis for this book. Perspectives on RTI were characterized as predominantly focused on either measurement issues, which are important for the purpose of identifying students as learning disabled, or instructional issues, which are important for the purpose of preventing learning difficulties. It is the latter preventative perspective that is emphasized throughout this book as one instantiation of an interactive view of reading and writing.
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