Preface

Understanding, Assessing, and Teaching Reading: A Diagnostic Approach, Seventh Edition, is based on the premise that a diagnostic approach to assessment and instruction is essential for reading programs in which all children improve in reading. We have designed this book to help teachers make the knowledge and skills of a diagnostic approach an integral part of learning about their readers. To achieve this goal we have combined theory, knowledge, and skills with practical application.

The demand is greater than ever for teachers who know how to use assessment to inform teaching, but even more so we need teachers who know why they do what they do. We emphasize the importance of teachers and explain the many roles they play for young readers. Good teachers must know the many factors that affect reading and also the many assessment techniques they can use to better understand these factors. Good teachers ask and answer questions about each student to help them select, administer, and interpret the most appropriate assessments. When information is gathered to answer questions about students, assessment is a powerful process. With the right information, teachers can make much better decisions about how to help readers. To this end, we present many reading skills, strategies, and teaching techniques. We make no assumption that any one strategy or teaching technique will meet the needs of all students, and we encourage teachers to look for students’ strengths first and then to find teaching strategies and techniques that build on these strengths.

We know the term diagnostic can be intimidating. In Chapter 1 we set the stage by describing the diagnostic approach clearly and in student-centered ways. We hope this introduction will help teachers demystify and humanize what a diagnostic approach can mean for their students’ growth as readers. We present a model for applying diagnostics first for individual students and then scaled for teaching full classrooms of students.

In Chapters 2 through 5 we present information on specific aspects of assessment each teacher must be able to apply with understanding. They have been written in a specific order to prioritize techniques that provide immediately useful information about each child as a reader. These chapters are oriented to three guiding questions that help teachers choose the most appropriate assessment techniques: What do I want to know? Why do I want to know it? How can I best discover this information?

In Chapters 6 through 13 we focus on teaching and learning specific aspects of reading, with additional help in assessment. Each of these teaching chapters follows a standard format and is written to stand alone, to be read and used in any order. We have provided titles for many texts that could be used with young readers to give teachers a head start on carrying out as much assessment and instruction as they can with authentic texts.

In Chapters 14 and 15 we provide suggestions on partnering with families to help readers grow, and how to apply and bring together the diagnostic approach from the entire text.

A full Informal Reading Inventory is provided in the Appendix to enable full implementation of the IRI as presented in Chapter 4 without requiring the purchase of supplemental books. We have streamlined the IRI process of scoring and interpretation to match our diagnostic approach.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

Understanding, Assessing, and Teaching Reading: A Diagnostic Approach is a teacher-friendly book designed to boost teachers’ confidence in helping young readers. We have kept this goal in mind in making substantial revisions to the current edition.
• The title has been changed to emphasize the positive information-seeking attitude of diagnostics as opposed to the deficit model of readers implied by the term diagnosis. This positive approach to readers and teaching is an important orienting principle throughout the book. A new cohesive assessment model is presented as a guiding principle used throughout the book.
• We have replaced now-outdated information on remediation programs to discuss the recent demands and reorientation around reading interventions and how to approach this current trend in reading programming sensibly.
• Many of the structural and organizational changes outlined below are based on the current need to help readers navigate and use textbooks in the e-reader format as well as the print format. This includes an effort to make each chapter stand alone where possible.
• We updated the lists of children’s literature to include many recent titles teachers can use to engage students in authentic reading while assessing and teaching in a diagnostic approach.
• Chapter objectives have been made more direct and easy to navigate, with a clear presentation of objectives at the beginning of each chapter and a review and discussion of each objective at the end of the chapter.
• Chapters 3 through 5 represent combinations of past chapters and reorganization to bring all the information on assessment into a prioritized sequence at the beginning of the book. These changes follow ongoing instructor feedback from the previous two editions.
• Each chapter also includes a new section titled From Assessment to Instruction with specific ideas on how to move back and forth between these two important principles of teaching.
• The chapter on fluency is entirely new. We have waited for much of the bandwagon to pass on this topic, so that we could present it with a fresh perspective, including a critical look at missteps in fluency assessment during the past fifteen years.
• The forms and administration instructions for the Informal Reading Inventory have been revised and condensed to be simpler to administer, score, and interpret.
• Inside the front and rear covers is a new guide showing how chapters connect to specific items from the Common Core State Standards.
Understanding a Diagnostic Approach to Assessing and Teaching Reading

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to . . .

1.1 Discuss the attributes of a diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading and the beliefs on which it is based.

1.2 Explain the four parts of a diagnostic pattern and how they relate to a diagnostic approach.

1.3 Describe the basic ideas that form the foundation of Response to Intervention and how they connect to a diagnostic approach.

1.4 Explain how reading can be defined and how defining reading influences a diagnostic approach.

1.5 Compare and contrast proficient and less proficient reading behaviors.

1.6 Define English learners and explain the levels of language proficiency through which they progress.

1.7 Construct a timeline that shows how readers change over time.
Chapter 1  Understanding a Diagnostic Approach to Assessing and Teaching Reading

SCENARIO: ASSESSING AND TEACHING READING: A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH IN ACTION

When you walk into Ms. Johnson’s third-grade classroom, you realize that something special is taking place; you can sense the excitement of learning. Often no one notices your arrival because they are so engrossed in what they are doing; they are both motivated and engaged.

Ms. Johnson’s classroom hums with learning noise. It’s a room in which children and teacher alike are involved in a dynamic and interactive teaching and learning program driven by ongoing assessment. Ms. Johnson is constantly asking and answering questions about her students. These questions range from those about how readers feel and what they believe about reading to how they think before, during, and after reading to how they use structures such as words, letters, sounds, and grammar to read. She returns constantly to three powerful questions when choosing assessment tools: What do I want to know? Why do I want to know? How can I best discover the information? She also asks a fourth question: How can I use what I discover? Because she answers these questions for each student she works with, she can design targeted, purposeful instruction to help her advance the growth of all readers.

Throughout the day, you can observe Ms. Johnson “zooming in” to focus on individuals and then “zooming out” to apply what she knows to groups or the whole class. This requires flexible, dynamic grouping tailored to children’s strengths and needs. Children flow from one group to another depending on the purpose for the group. Groups are formed and dissolved based on specific goals and purposes, not as ongoing ability groups. It’s not unusual at any given moment to see her class split into a variety of group types: small groups, pairs, and individuals.

Conferencing is at the heart of Ms. Johnson’s zoom in, zoom out approach. She meets with each of her students at least once every week to review progress and to establish new goals. She keeps copious notes of these conferences and uses them to inform her future instruction.

Ms. Johnson is always probing, questioning, and keeping a sharp eye out for what her students do well and for that they are showing her they need to learn. But she also continually reflects to evaluate herself as a teacher, the materials she uses when teaching, and the classroom context. For example, she constantly adds to the classroom library as a result of what she learns from talking with students about reading interests. Fully understanding that interest and attitudes significantly influence reading, she wants to make sure that the classroom environment supports her students’ interests and that it promotes a positive association with reading. To that end, she has learned from her students that many different types of text count as reading, and she has included them as a part of the classroom library and explicit reading instruction. These include magazines, brochures, newspapers, comics, and electronic texts. She also regularly shares with students what she is reading and why she reads.

Ms. Johnson is passionate about assessing, learning, and teaching reading, and her passion plays out every day in her classroom. She continually strives to be the best possible teacher. A diagnostic approach is central to her ongoing growth as a teacher, and central to her students’ learning and development.

DEFINING A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH

A diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading is a comprehensive way of using data that is gathered by examining three primary components of effective reading instruction: learner, instruction, and context. This examination is ongoing and multifaceted in that it requires teachers to use a variety of assessment techniques including student self-assessment, teacher self-assessment, and assessment of instructional materials and contexts to provide the best possible instruction for all learners. It is based on the following beliefs:

1. Diagnostics are necessary problem-solving tools for looking into any complicated system. Systems are made of components that in turn have their own moving parts.
Components interact with each other in a system to make something larger happen. Monitoring the inner workings of a system helps people to notice when something goes wrong, to keep it in good working order, and to figure out how to improve the system. Moreover, diagnostics can help people avoid tinkering with components that need no help.

Reading is one such complex system. When people read, different sets of "moving parts" interact among the texts they read, the contexts in which they read, and themselves as readers. To help all learners achieve strong reading potential, educators using a diagnostic approach examine all three areas to identify learner strengths and needs.

2. Reading diagnosis is about knowing readers. Although the word diagnosis is frowned on by many educators for one reason or another, we maintain that when the original Greek meaning, “to come to know,” is emphasized, it is a useful term to discuss how to identify children’s reading strengths and needs. We subscribe to the definition of diagnosis offered in The Literacy Dictionary:

The act, process, or result of identifying the nature of a disorder or disability through observation and examination. As the term is used in education, it often includes the planning of instruction and an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses (i.e., needs) of the student.¹

When analyzing this definition, two points that relate to a diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading become evident:

• Using observation and other assessment techniques throughout the school day are necessary ingredients to tease out students’ strengths and needs.
• Using what is discovered from the observations and assessment techniques is essential to plan appropriate instruction.

The necessity of looking for both strengths and needs cannot be overstated. Knowledge of what a child can do is always helpful in providing insight into what a child needs to learn. Just as important is to recognize that many factors affect reading performance (the topic of Chapter 2).

Our rationale for using the word diagnosis leads us to use a computer coder as a positive metaphor of diagnostics. Consider the tasks of computer coders. They use diagnostic tools that will help them to identify strengths and potential in the code they write and any possible errors or bugs. Coders who apply diagnostic tools can improve and find new uses for good code as well as using the same tools to repair faults.

And so it is the diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading that we promote in this text. Teachers first search for strengths and use those strengths to build up to what students need to learn. This search for strength extends beyond the learner and includes instruction, texts, and contexts—all of which influence reading development.

Our view of diagnosis is supported by the ten principles set forth by the position statement, Excellent Reading Teachers, of the board of directors of the International Reading Association (IRA):

• Diagnosis underlies prevention.
• Early diagnosis is essential in order to ameliorate reading problems from the start.
• Diagnosis is continuous.
• Diagnosis and instruction are interwoven.
• Diagnosis is a means to improvement; it is not an end in itself.
• Teacher-made as well as published reading assessment instruments are used in diagnosis.
• Noneducational as well as educational factors are considered.
• Diagnosis identifies strengths as well as needs.
• Diagnosis is an individual process; that is, in diagnosis, the teacher focuses on an individual child. (Diagnostic information can be obtained from various contexts;
working in a one-on-one relationship with a child, observing a child in a group, or observing a child doing seatwork.)

• The teacher works to establish rapport and treats each student as an individual worthy of respect.²

3. Identifying readers’ strengths is a good first step in accelerating readers’ growth. Children are always showing what they know and need to know. For example, a child who is reading every word correctly yet cannot discuss what has been read shows that the reader knows how to identify words. What needs attention is comprehension. Using the strength to teach to the need, a teacher might begin a comprehension-focused lesson by saying something such as, “You are excellent at identifying words. But another important part of being a reader is to understand what words mean and how authors use them to create memorable stories. That’s what we are going to start working on.”

As you can see, beginning with strengths is anything but pretending that students know everything and just need to be encouraged. Instead, teachers who look for strengths first see the child as the one who can bring something to the new learning to help make the new learning easier and more meaningful. We are under no false assumptions about reader factors that might need to be addressed to help the reader achieve. But we also acknowledge that many readers have not had sufficient opportunities to develop strengths before they are labeled with terms such as at risk, deficient, or below grade level. Until each child has had many engaged opportunities to develop and apply their strengths to texts and contexts (over weeks and months of time), we should not be too hasty in assuming that all reading difficulties emanate from the reader. In fact, this is one of the premises behind intervention models such as those that are often used under the auspices of Response to Intervention.

4. Identifying needs is an important part of a diagnostic approach. As stated above, learners are always showing what they know and need to know. Part of helping children to move forward is acknowledging their needs and designing appropriate instruction to address those needs. Our diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading suggests a clear priority on first looking for strengths in all three dimensions of reading. That is, a teacher will want information from the affective domain (i.e., interests, attitudes, and identity), cognitive domain (i.e., metacognition and comprehension), and perceptual domain (i.e., word knowledge and phonics).

5. Zooming in and out is essential. Another key aspect of our model is what we call “zooming in and zooming out.” Zooming in means spending time getting to know just one learner very well and learning to teach based on this knowledge. Zooming out means figuring out how to scale the management of information and planning for groups and whole classes. As Ms. Johnson in our opening scenario helps to illustrate, when teachers zoom in, they get to know one student in depth. Doing so can help teachers to develop dispositions, knowledge, and skills necessary for working with young learners. When teachers zoom out, they learn to apply this same disposition, knowledge, and skill when teaching small groups or a whole class. They generalize their understandings to the wider audiences.

SCENARIO: SARAH ZOOMS IN AND ZOOMS OUT

“I don’t know how you handle all that chaos!” says Audra, observing free-choice reading in Sarah’s second-grade class. Crates of books on a central table look like a beehive as students buzz back and forth, picking out and replacing books. Before the observation, Audra learned that all the books were selected based on an interest inventory. “How do you help them find the right level?” she asks.

“I look at text levels in a broad way,” Sarah answers. “The research is pretty clear that books within the K–1 range are more or less the same. The same is true for the discrete levels in second grade. By third grade, the range of texts is pretty broad! The librarian and I keep the crates in a range that matches grades K–3. But if the books the kids want come from higher levels, we put them in the crate anyway. I want to help each kid find an emotional match—a kind of text, a topic, a genre, or whatever can hook them. I have learned that there is more than one way to match readers and texts and
that this emotional matching is powerful. When the emotional match is good, the words and sentences seem much easier to read."

"Yeah, but it looks like most of the kids aren’t really staying with any one text. What if they never get focused and get down to reading?"

"Oh, I’m totally with you there. I never would have been able to handle the constant shift of interests if I hadn’t learned the importance of zooming in closely on one student for an entire trimester before thinking about doing this with my whole class—zooming out, so to speak. Raul couldn’t stay focused on one topic week to week in our tutoring sessions, but I finally learned that it was all part of the search. When he learned that I was really going to follow through on bringing him what he was interested in, he was always engaged in what I brought and “tried it on for size.” Gradually, he became more willing to tell me what he wanted next. It took us a few weeks, but soon we had a pile of texts he was interested in browsing through, and before long we found one he got totally hooked on. It was his touchstone text. He helped me learn that it’s natural for kids to need a lot of time to get to know a lot of texts before they settle on those they can get addicted to. It took a crate of books just for him! So then I figured if it was really important, I should zoom out and scale it for the whole class. Let me show you how I organize it."

Audra and Sarah walk over to a file cabinet, and Sarah pulls out a student folder. Opening it, she comments, “Each student’s interest—what they’re looking for now and what they’ve liked in the past—is all in the sticky notes on the interest section of the reader profile. All the students know they’re on the hunt for what will get them hooked. That’s what we talk about in our individual conferences each week. When their interests change, I make a note about it on a sticky and add it to the profile. For example, when I look over and see Mandy sifting through the pile, I know she’s already got her crocodile books and she’s looking for something else! I’m comfortable with the whole class looking like chaos because I know that it really is not; on the personal level each student is pursuing a goal to find their ‘binge’.”

“I don’t know if I could do this all at once like you’re doing,” says Audra.

“I don’t think you should,” Sarah replies. “I would suggest zooming in on one student for a trimester. The power you experience with one student will help you get the confidence you need to start scaling it for your whole class—to zoom out.”

A Diagnostic Pattern and Its Relationship to a Diagnostic Approach to Assessing and Teaching Reading

Appropriate instruction stems from and is interwoven with accurate and pertinent diagnostic information for all learners. Teachers are continually gathering this information and are constantly making hunches along the way to determine what readers might need to learn. Teachers look for a pattern of behavior across different reading experiences and assessments to inform and confirm their hunches. They then design instruction to play out their hunches as in the following example of a “hunch list.”

Four steps can be used when designing such instruction. These steps can be seen as a diagnostic pattern in that they are continually used to assess and teach reading.

1. Be mindful of factors beyond the learner. Although this diagnostic pattern primarily focuses on the learner, remember that there are factors that go beyond the learners that influence reading. These factors are discussed in Chapter 2.
2. Ask three questions to ascertain students’ reading: What do I want to know? Why do I want to know? How can I best discover the information? Chapters 3 through 13 provide a variety of assessments that are framed around these important questions and can help you decide the tools you want to use.
3. Once you have selected the tools you want, use them to assess students. When analyzing students’ performances, look for both strengths and needs.
4. Determine how you will use what you have discovered. To zoom in, look at one child. To zoom out, compile students’ individual performances on a class matrix and look for how students perform as a class.
This four-step pattern relates to a diagnostic approach because it helps teachers to apply its basic tenets. The pattern is a practical, doable way to accelerate the growth of all readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hunch List</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hunch</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 Needs to be exposed to biography</td>
<td>Has never seen a biography but reads a lot of nonfiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2 Work on spelling</td>
<td>Looks to me to spell a word \n Wants to spell everything right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3 Work on phonics – patterns – double letters</td>
<td>– Spelling \n – Recognizing words when reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4 Work on strategies</td>
<td>She has a hard time when stumbling on an unfamiliar word \n guesses and says random words that starts with the same letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5 Does better in oral reading than silent reading</td>
<td>Modified Miscue Analysis \n Scores better on oral inconsistent with literal/inference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6 Work on rhyming/spelling</td>
<td>Struggled with creating words until we started rhyming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7 Work on word parts letters</td>
<td>Stumbled on words and just called out words starting with the same letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8 Identify same word parts/letters</td>
<td>Looked at me for assistance/nod of approval \n – Very unsure \n * More confident with rhyming words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9 Needs more practice reading silently</td>
<td>Doesn’t enjoy reading silently – dreads it \n Struggles more with reading silently (comprehension) \n – Graded passages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10 Likes breaking apart stories and putting them back together</td>
<td>Relates to Does it make sense strategy \n Didn’t want to stop \n Wanted to put story together without reading it first, then checked to see if she is correct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION AND ITS CONNECTION TO A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO ASSESSING AND TEACHING READING**

Our diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading aligns with intervention models that fall under the recent *Response to Intervention* (RtI) initiative.

The latest version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), which was passed by Congress in 2004, specifies that it is no longer necessary to show a discrepancy in order to determine who has a learning problem (e.g., learning to read) that is severe enough to be classified as a learning disability. In its place is a process called *Response to Intervention* (RtI). See the Appendix for the International Reading Association’s Guiding Principles on RtI. The IRA commission on RtI summarizes the actual laws and provides clear principles on how to put the intent of the laws into action.
The three-step process entails providing children who appear to be struggling with the best possible instruction and taking a look at how they perform under such conditions. This first round of instruction takes place in the classroom context and is provided by the classroom teacher. If the child makes little or no progress in comparison to his or her peers, the second step involves providing supplementary instruction, either individually or in a small group. The classroom teacher or another professional provides this instruction. If the child still makes little progress, additional tests are administered to determine whether there is a specific learning disability. If there is, the child is placed in special education classes and given more intensive intervention.

*Intervention* is a key word here. Just as with a *diagnostic approach*, RtI insists that identifying a problem early on and doing something to ameliorate it better ensures that students will continue to progress in reading. And, as discussed in nearly every chapter in this book there are numerous reading assessment techniques teachers can use to identify student strengths and needs beginning in kindergarten. Each technique is accompanied by teaching suggestions that will assist teachers with planning appropriate instruction.

Regardless of the intervention you use, remember that all are about making sure that learners receive the best possible instruction. As such, when looking at children’s progress or lack thereof, looking beyond learners to the instruction they have received is essential to ensure that they did indeed receive the best possible instruction delivered by the most knowledgeable teacher.

**WHAT ARE MODELS OF THE READING PROCESS?**

Definitions of reading are usually classified into one of three models. In fact, the field of reading is replete with theories, and different catch phrases are sometimes assigned to the same general theories, further confusing those who try to understand the various theories. One area that has caused much disagreement and debate among reading theorists is that of beginning reading. Controversy has centered on whether the reading process is a holistic one (emphasis on meaning), that is, a *top-down model*; a subskill process (code emphasis), that is, a *bottom-up model*; and, more recently, whether it is an *interactive model*. The interactive model is somewhat but not entirely a combination of the top-down and bottom-up models in that both processes take place simultaneously depending on the difficulty of the material for the individual reader. (See Figure 1.1.)

Classroom practices are based on the theories that teachers embrace. Those who believe in a bottom-up model will emphasize decoding to the exclusion of meaning; those who believe primarily in a top-down model emphasize meaning. Those who believe in an interactive model will probably use a combination of both.

**FIGURE 1.1  Models of Reading**
Reading theorists often tend to be exclusive; they promote their own theory and generally neglect others. The classroom teacher, however, need not accept an either-or dichotomy, but rather should seek a synthesis of all the elements that have proven workable; that is, the classroom teacher can take elements from each theory based on the individual needs of students. Good teachers realize that the reading process is very complex and that there are no simple answers.

Extreme perspectives prejudice teachers’ diagnostic decisions, making it difficult for them to examine all aspects of reading. In the interest of an individual student, the interactive version of the diagram shown in Figure 1.1 is the one that enables learners and teachers to move back and forth between work with meaningful wholes (phrases, sentences, books) and their discrete parts (words, sounds, syllables, letters); it is more flexible.3

All of this said, let’s remember that at the end of the day, what is most important is knowing how to adjust teaching and learning structures based on what students respond to, a major premise of Response to Intervention previously discussed.

DEFINING READING FOR A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO ASSESSING AND TEACHING READING

There is no single, set definition of reading. A broad definition is that reading is a dynamic, complex act that involves bringing to and getting meaning from the printed page. This definition implies that readers bring their backgrounds, experiences, and emotions into play. It further implies that students who are upset or physically ill will bring these feelings into the act of reading, and these feelings will influence their interpretative processes. Yet another implication is that a person well versed in the subject matter at hand will gain more from reading the material than someone less knowledgeable. For example, a student who is a good critical thinker will gain more from a critical passage than one who is not. A student who has strong dislikes will come away with different feelings and understandings than a student with strong likings related to a given text.

As this explanation suggests, the definition we choose influences the assessment and teaching of reading. This particular definition, for example, suggests that one would be interested in addressing students’ background relative to a given text or topic, their feelings (or affect), and their overall wellness.

Our Definition

As noted above, we see reading as a balance between three domains. In Fitzgerald’s review,4 she characterized these as follows:

1. Affective: How readers feel and what they believe about reading. A clear body of research exists on readers’ attitudes, identity, and interests. This research has been applied both to assessment and to teaching.
2. Global: How readers think and process information when they read and when they think about their reading—cognitive and metacognitive processes.
3. Local: How readers use the structural parts of language to help them think. This includes how readers decode, how they apply vocabulary knowledge, and how they use their sense of syntax.

To teach these domains of reading well, teachers must ask and answer questions about all three aspects for every reader. The affective domain has a governing effect on the global and local processes. That is, when students experience high interest, positive attitudes, and a strong identity with reading, the affective aspect of reading paves the way for progress in learning the global and local skills. Conversely, when readers experience boring material, encounter or develop negative attitudes, and believe reading is for other people, the teaching of global and local skills falls on stony ground—the seeds of teaching cannot grow there! A comprehensive, diagnostic approach to assessment and teaching begins with the affective, and keeps its governing role in mind as all other aspects of learning to read move forward.
Good Reader Characteristics

Our diagnostic model puts teachers in a position of asking questions about these three domains constantly throughout teaching and learning. This is evident in the assessment tools we provide in this text.

GOOD READER CHARACTERISTICS

We need to be mindful of what makes someone a good reader, because these characteristics help to set “big picture” goals for readers in a diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading. Regardless of how theorists frame the reading process and regardless of the definitions teachers adopt for reading, some reader characteristics remain constant and cut across all definitions.

Proficient readers have a large repertoire of strategies at their disposal, which they use to help them better comprehend the text at hand (see Table 1.1). The strategies they employ will shift depending on their background for the text and the manner in which the text is written. If they have read and heard stories, for instance, they most likely have an understanding of story structure (i.e., the pattern used to write stories). This text structure poses few if any difficulties, so they are able to read with greater ease.

In essence, then, good readers are active, purposeful, evaluative, thoughtful, strategic, persistent, and productive. We explain each of these attributes in Table 1.2. When you hear someone exclaim, “He is a good reader!” this is what it means.

But what do we do with children who do not carry this label? Can we teach them the “good reader” characteristics? Thanks to the work of several researchers who have designed metacognition training programs to explore this question, we know that the answer is “yes.” But the characteristics must be explicitly taught; for whatever reason, less proficient readers do not acquire them with as little explicit instruction as do many of the good readers.

TABLE 1.1 Summary of Proficient and Less Proficient Reading Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficient Reading Behaviors</th>
<th>Less Proficient Reading Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to make what is read sound like language and make sense</td>
<td>Attempt to identify all of the words correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor what is read for sense and coherence</td>
<td>Monitor what is read for correct letter/sound and word identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build meaning using the text, their purpose, and their background</td>
<td>Build meaning by attempting to identify the letters and words correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a variety of strategies when meaning breaks down: reread,</td>
<td>Use a limited range of strategies when meaning breaks down: sound it out, skip it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rethink, read on and return if necessary, substitute, skip it,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sound it out, seek assistance, use text aids (pictures, graphs,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charts), ignore it, stop reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectively sample the print; use a mixture of visual (print)</td>
<td>Use most of the visual (print) information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and nonvisual (background) information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use and integrate a variety of systems of language to create</td>
<td>Rely heavily on graphemes, graphophonemics, and morphemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vary the manner in which texts are read based on purpose</td>
<td>Read all texts in a similar manner regardless of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically correct one in three miscues</td>
<td>Typically correct one in twenty miscues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to correct miscues that affect meaning</td>
<td>Attempt to correct miscues that fail to resemble the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chunk” what is read</td>
<td>Process letter by letter, which results in tunnel vision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of a child’s level of proficiency, helping all children to maximize their full potential as readers is more important than assigning a label, a view that is supported by the Council for Exceptional Children. Remember that the goal is to discover children’s strengths and needs and to design appropriate instruction to address these. Put another way, children are always ready to learn something and our job as teachers is to figure out what that something is. Learning is what we’re after. The success of education depends on adapting teaching to the individual differences among learners. That children vary is natural; what is unnatural is to assume that all children are the same.

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO ASSESSING AND TEACHING READING

What we have said in this chapter (and continue to espouse in the chapters that follow) applies to all learners. One particular group of learners that is often singled out is English learners, those children who bring a vast array of languages other than English to school. Because teachers may not know English learners’ primary language(s), the diagnostic approach of assessing, learning, and teaching might seem insurmountable. But this need not be the case. Let’s begin by understanding just who English language learners (ELLs) are and how they become proficient English speakers.

Researchers have identified different levels of language proficiency through which language learners progress. Figure 1.2 draws on these initial delineations of levels as well as others’ adaptations of them. Through it, we show the levels as delineated in the TESOL standards, and provide a brief description of each. Keep in mind that when

---

**TABLE 1.2 Explanations of Good Reader Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good Reader Attributes</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Readers bring their own experiences to reading the text and to constructing meaning. They make predictions and make decisions such as what to read and reread, and when to slow down or speed up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>Readers have purposes in mind when they read a text. They then read with these purposes in mind. For example, they might choose to read for enjoyment or entertainment. At other times, they might read to discover specific details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Readers evaluate what they are reading, asking themselves whether the text is meeting their initial purposes for reading it. They also evaluate the quality of the text and whether it is of value. They react to the text both emotionally and intellectually. Readers also evaluate their interaction with others in different instructional groupings as well as their ability to function as both leaders and followers in the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Readers think about the text selection before, during, and after reading. Before reading, they think about what they might already know. During reading, they think about how the current text relates to what they already know. After reading, they think about what the text offered and formulate their interpretations of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Readers use specific strategies such as predicting, monitoring, and visualizing to ensure that they are comprehending the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>Readers keep reading a text even when it might be rather difficult if they feel that the text is helping them to accomplish a set purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive</td>
<td>Readers are productive in more than one way. For instance, they bring their own experiences to the text at hand to construct or produce their understanding of it. Because they are engaged with reading, they are more productive in terms of the amount of reading they do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ages and Stages of Literacy Development

FIGURE 1.2  Levels of Language Proficiency, Descriptions, and Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Language Proficiency</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Starting</td>
<td>Students have a limited understanding of English. They may respond using nonverbal cues in an attempt to communicate basic needs. They begin to imitate others and use some single words or simple phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: Emerging</td>
<td>Students are beginning to understand some phrases and simple sentences. They respond using memorized words and phrases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: Developing</td>
<td>Students’ listening comprehension improves, and they can understand written English. Students are fairly comfortable engaging in social conversations using simple sentences, but they are just beginning to develop their academic language proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4: Expanding</td>
<td>Students understand and frequently use conversational English with relatively high accuracy. They are able to communicate their ideas in both oral and written contexts. They are also showing the ability to use academic vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5: Bridging</td>
<td>Students comprehend and engage in conversational and academic English with proficiency. They perform at or near grade level in reading, writing, and other content areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning a new language, any individual, regardless of age, progresses through these levels. To assume that the levels coincide with specific grade levels is problematic. Also problematic is seeing language learning as a linear process. As Freeman and Freeman make clear, it is anything but. When using language in less formal settings, such as when having conversations with friends, ELLs may demonstrate that they have acquired Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and be functioning at level 5 (bridging), an advanced level of language acquisition. However, these same learners can and do have difficulty using language in more formal settings, such as school, where they may demonstrate that they are functioning at level 3 (developing), the middle level of language proficiency. They need assistance in acquiring academic language. In other words, these ELLs need help in acquiring Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The same children who appear to be functioning at a given level in the classroom are instead functioning at different levels depending on how they are called on to use language.

AGES AND STAGES OF LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Reading ability continues to develop throughout life. For that matter, so do writing, speaking, listening, and viewing abilities. In fact, we might say that reading ability grows with exposure to oral language and print. In general, children at given ages share common characteristics in terms of reading and writing abilities. Different reading researchers and educators cast these characteristics into stages of growth to help teachers determine who is displaying age-appropriate reading behaviors. Knowing some of these behaviors can also be extremely helpful in trying to determine who might need further assistance with learning to speak, listen, read, or write.

Table 1.3 shows the stages of literacy growth and some of their descriptors. Keep in mind that stages can overlap and that students rarely display every characteristic of one stage before they move into another. Many of the characteristics stay the same from stage to stage, but they become more sophisticated. Also, as when anyone is learning something new, there can be plateaus. So, while the table shows a neat linear process that happens in a smooth tempo, in reality the tempo is more halting at times.

All of these stages are based on the assumption that children receive a tremendous amount of support and reading experiences on their way to becoming proficient readers.
### Table 1.3 Stages and Descriptors of Literacy Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Sample Benchmarks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Emergent</td>
<td>Viewed as a foundation on which children develop oral language and a curiosity about print.</td>
<td>• Attends to read-alouds</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Typically before kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergent Literacy</td>
<td>Children show more interest in all aspects of literacy.</td>
<td>• Retains oral directions</td>
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<td>Typically kindergarten; may overlap into the beginning of first grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Oral language facility expands. Children develop word analysis skills, start to show fluency in reading and increased understanding of many words. Their writing begins to follow print conventions.</td>
<td>• Uses increased oral vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Typically first grade; continues into second and third grade for some</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost Proficient Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Children grow in their understanding of literacy. Oral language shows increased vocabulary, writing is more frequent, and silent reading increases.</td>
<td>• Grows in use of standard English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Typically begins at end of second grade and continues into fourth or fifth grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Children use reading and writing for a variety of purposes. The majority of skills are acquired and used as appropriate.</td>
<td>• Uses context to determine word meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Typically begins in fourth grade and continues through life</td>
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</table>
Gladwell has noted that expertise is usually linked to thousands of hours of experience. Jim Loehr echoes and extends Gladwell by emphasizing that it is not only hours, but also intense cycles of engagement and rest that turns regular people into experts. The key word here is engagement, and using our diagnostic approach to assessing, learning, and teaching reading capitalizes on it. That is, we are far more interested in helping teachers understand how to spend time with their students being engaged in reading—they will want to spend time on. When we talk to lifelong readers, we usually find that their reading history is punctuated by intense binges of reading followed by periods of less reading and/or lighter content. And this is exactly our goal for all readers. We want to enable them to find their way to this kind of investment in time and engagement.

REVISITING THE OPENING SCENARIO

Now that you have had time to learn about the beliefs and components of the diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading that frames this book, reread the opening scenario. Which ideas does Ms. Johnson best exemplify?

AUTHORS’ SUMMARY

Having read the chapter, let’s revisit the outcomes stated at the beginning of this chapter. Before reading our summary statements for each outcome, we suggest that you read the outcome and summarize it for yourself. Once finished, cross-check your response with our brief summary to determine how well you recalled the major points.

1.1 Discuss the attributes of a diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading and the beliefs on which it is based.

- Teachers with a diagnostic approach use problem-solving tools to know each complex aspect of their students as readers. They prioritize discovery of student strengths, and plan learning and teaching activity to build on what readers already know and can do. As readers build on strengths, teachers help them to discover and achieve what they need to learn for ongoing growth. The diagnostic process is highly individualized, but excellent teachers learn how to manage and orchestrate it for groups and for whole classes of readers by zooming in and zooming out between individuals and groups.

1.2 Explain the four parts of a diagnostic pattern and how they relate to a diagnostic approach.

- Diagnostics involve checking factors beyond the reader’s control that can affect learning. A diagnostic approach involves a constant cycle of questioning: What do I want to know? Why do I want to know? How can I best discover the information? These questions help teachers select and use assessment tools that match each individual. They use the answers they discover to arrange reading contexts for their students and to plan instruction.

1.3 Describe the basic ideas that form the foundation of Response to Intervention and how they connect to a diagnostic approach.

- The diagnostic process helps teachers continually adjust teaching depending on student strengths and needs. This kind of ongoing adjustment by teachers in the interest of student growth is the heart of Response to Intervention.

1.4 Explain how reading can be defined and how defining reading influences a diagnostic approach.

- Definitions of reading in research and curriculum programs determine whether they address the affective, global, and local aspects of reading. A diagnostic approach requires attention to all three, and teachers must learn to recognize it when definitions of reading might prevent them from addressing all three. Many existing programs for assessment
and teaching either ignore or address indirectly the affective aspects of reading. Because of its governing role, strong teachers learn to address this aspect as the top priority despite its exclusion from many programs.

1.5 **Compare and contrast proficient and less proficient reading behaviors.**

- Paying close attention to what good readers do helps teachers set and achieve goals for all readers. Knowing what less proficient readers do helps teachers attend to the potential buildup of frustration that comes from these behaviors. Often these less proficient behaviors come from beliefs, attitudes, or feelings about reading or from misconceptions about what good readers do.

1.6 **Define English learners and explain the levels of language proficiency through which they progress.**

- English learners may speak more than one world language at home, but they are expected to use primarily English at school. The levels of proficiency from Starting to Bridging represent typical progress. Teachers who grew up using primarily English in many contexts must recognize that there is nothing wrong with students who are in typical stages of progress, and that these stages may progress unevenly for different social and academic uses of English (e.g., a learner may progress rapidly in English for friendship, but a bit slower for learning math and at a different rate for learning in social studies).

1.7 **Construct a timeline that shows how readers change over time.**

- This timeline helps adults recognize that their view of proficient reading develops over years and that there is nothing wrong with students who are in a recognized stage. It is important to remember the basic order of progress and to be able to diagram it.

### SUGGESTED THOUGHT QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. You have been assigned to a special committee to develop a diagnostic approach to assess and teach reading. Discuss what factors you would consider in developing such a plan.

2. Ask a number of teachers how they define reading. Observe their classes and try to discern whether their reading program reflects their stated definition of reading. Discuss whether your observations show top-down, bottom-up, or interactive models of reading.

3. Observe teachers to determine how they assess, learn, and teach reading. Which combinations of elements seem to be most evident? How do you know?

4. Use Table 1.1, “Summary of Proficient and Less Proficient Reading Behaviors,” to observe a reader. Highlight the characteristics you notice and provide an example of what you see.

### WEBSITES

- [http://www.readwritethink.org/resources/index.asp](http://www.readwritethink.org/resources/index.asp)
  A partnership between the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), this site provides professional resources.

  The electronic journal of the International Reading Association provided this article that explores what it means to be a reader. The author identifies and discusses various types of readers. This article will help teachers (pre-service or in-service) to gain awareness of the various readers they will/do encounter every day. An IRA membership is required to access this website.

- [http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li7lk1.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/reading/li7lk1.htm)
  This site provides a definition of reading. See how well your personal definition coincides with that of the authors and then think about the implications of the similarities and differences between your definition and the one on this site.

  Providing a cognitive framework for reading comprehension, this site offers information on cognitive elements of reading, a glossary of reading terms, instructional resources, research, and much more.


# CHAPTER 2

Factors That Affect Reading Performance

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario: Angelique and Sara—A Study in Contrast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating Between Educational and Noneducational Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noneducational Factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to . . .

| 2.1 | Differentiate between educational and noneducational factors that affect reading performance. |
| 2.2 | List and describe educational factors that can impact reading growth. |
| 2.3 | List and explain noneducational factors that can impact reading growth. |
Angelique and Sara are both in Mrs. Brown’s first-grade class. Angelique is a bubbly, inquisitive, alert child who is excited about learning and looks upon every day as an adventure. She loves books and reads well. She asks good questions and likes to learn about things in depth. She talks about nocturnal birds and how she saw an owl one evening. She converses knowledgeably about wild animals and tame animals, and she is always eager to show anyone the stories she has written about different animals.

Angelique is quite verbal. She has an extensive vocabulary and uses words correctly. She can talk about animals, books she has read, books that have been read to her, other parts of the country, and many other things. She can give you word opposites and words similar in meaning. She can tell if you are being “funny.” In addition, she can relate present information or experiences to past ones and make predictions about various things.

Angelique is an only child, and her college-educated parents adore her. They feel she is the joy of their lives. When she was born, her mother left her job to stay home with Angelique until she started school. Her parents read to her, talk to her, and interact with her. They take trips together and have flown to various other parts of the country. She has eaten different kinds of food in various restaurants, gone to zoos, farms, museums, and so on.

Sara, on the other hand, comes from a home in which she is the oldest of six children. At seven years of age, she has had a great amount of responsibility thrust upon her. Her mother works outside of the home, and often Sara has to stay home to help take care of the other children. Her father does not live at home with them. Sara is a “put upon” child. She is very mature for her age and is gaining many experiences. However, she has never traveled, has never been to a zoo or a farm, and she has never had anyone read to her. In short, Sara and Angelique’s home environments and life experiences are quite different.

Here are composites of these two children. Which child would you predict will succeed in school? Why?

**Angelique L.**
- Only child.
- Upper socioeconomic status.
- College-educated parents.
- Standard English is dominant language.
- Parents read to Angelique.
- Many books are available for Angelique.
- Newspapers, books, and magazines are available for parents.
- Parents read for pleasure.
- Angelique sees parents writing.
- Television is supervised.
- Parents discuss books and television shows with Angelique.
- Family does many things together.
- Angelique has pets.
- Angelique helps take care of pets.
- Family travels together to “fun” places.
- Child has her own computer.
- Time on computer and computer sites is supervised.

**Sara M.**
- Oldest of six children.
- Low socioeconomic status.
- Mother has a seventh-grade education.
- There is no father present.
Nonstandard English is spoken.
No newspapers, magazines, or books are visible.
Television is unsupervised.
No one reads to Sara.
Mother does not read for pleasure.
Sara is responsible for younger brothers and sisters.

You probably answered “Angelique,” and if you did, you would probably be correct. You are also probably saying that the deck has been stacked in Angelique’s favor. It has been; however, many children have backgrounds similar to those of Sara and Angelique. Most Angeliques do well in school because they have the background and experiences that seem to correlate well with school success. The Saras, who lack such backgrounds and experiences, are considered at-risk children. Unless they are identified early and helped, they will remain at high risk of failing in school; some may eventually drop out of school altogether. Certainly there are many children who come from low socioeconomic home environments who do well both in school and in life. The portrait of Sara M. is not meant to imply that all children who live in disadvantaged areas will not do well in school. We provide it to raise the awareness of the possibility.

As Angelique and Sara’s profiles help to illustrate, there are many factors associated with learning to read. In this chapter, we present several of these factors and explain how they affect reading performance. Although there may be some factors over which educators have little control (e.g., low-income home, little or no reading material in the home, lack of being read to), there are several factors over which teachers do have control (e.g., time spent reading at school, developing requisite background necessary for understanding a given concept, developing an ear for different ways to use language via reading aloud and other forms of classroom communication). Understanding these factors puts teachers in better positions to set their students up for success. In other words, teachers can do much to help children overcome any shortcomings, and successful teachers walk up to this challenge.

DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL AND NONEDUCATIONAL FACTORS

There are many ways to classify the many factors that affect children’s reading performance. For purposes of this text, we classify the different factors as either educational or noneducational factors. In Table 2.1, we provide an overview of these categories, a definition of each category, and a list of the specific factors we discuss in this chapter. When people talk about educational factors, they generally are referring to those factors that come under the domain or control of the educational system and influence learning. In this category, we would usually include the various methods and materials that the child has been exposed to, the teacher, the instructional time, and the school environment. Under noneducational factors, we generally would include physical health (general), vision, hearing, personality, and gender. Noneducational factors are supposedly those that do not come under the domain or control of the educational system and cannot be influenced by it. Although the two categories appear distinct at first glance, a second look shows that they are not necessarily; some factors overlap. For instance, although gender cannot be influenced by the schools, sex roles can. A case could even be made for general physical health as being influenced by educational practices. For example, children who are doing poorly in school may wish to avoid school to such an extent that they become ill every morning. The children’s emotional health influences their physical health so that they actually get a stomachache, headache, or throw up. Their emotional state may so affect them that they cannot eat or sleep. The physical symptoms are real, even though the cause may not be a virus or bacterium.
Rather than spending time debating which factors belong in one category or the other, the important idea here is the interrelatedness of the many factors that affect reading performance. A child who has difficulty learning to read usually has many accompanying emotional and social problems, and these are compounded as the child goes through school if he or she is not helped as soon as a problem is detected or suspected. Clearly, when using a reading diagnosis and improvement program, many factors need to be considered in order to help all children advance in their ability to read.

**TABLE 2.1 Factors Affecting Reading Performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Those factors that come under the domain or control of the educational system and influence learning</td>
<td>• Teaching methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Instructional materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Instructional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• School environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Diagnosed disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noneducational</td>
<td>Those factors that do not come under the domain or control of the educational system and cannot be influenced by it</td>
<td>• Home environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Dialect and language differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Physical: illness and nutrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Perceptual: visual and auditory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Emotional: self-concept, learned helplessness, motivation, attitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational factors in learning come under the domain or control of the educational system. Examples are teaching methods, instructional materials, instructional time, teachers, and school environment. If a child is experiencing difficulty in reading, it is generally a good idea to check his or her school record to see if there is any information that might shed light on the child’s problem. From the records, the teacher may be able to learn about the methods and materials the child has been exposed to in previous years. It may be that these were not effective, and something different should be tried. For example, a third-grade student might appear to have difficulty with decoding. Yet examination of school records might reveal that this child has been in systematic phonics programs since kindergarten. Rather than continuing to use systematic phonics as a primary mode of instruction, another approach (e.g., literature-based phonics, chunking strategies, whole word, language experience) seems warranted. The National Reading Panel’s review of research on phonics has shown that the effectiveness of systematic, sequential phonics instruction decreases each year after first grade. In this case, the reading model could be a major contributing factor to the problem.

**Reading Models**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, three models of learning to read inform and guide instructional decisions. For example, if teachers subscribe to a top-down view of reading, they will be likely to use a whole-to-part approach to instruct students. While many students may flourish in such a classroom, some may need the incremental steps of a bottom-up program in order to progress. The same holds true if a teacher favors a bottom-up model of reading. Some students will learn and others will not. A program based on an interactive model would work from both directions. The good news is that, like other educational factors, schools and often individual teachers usually have control over the reading models they use. If a child is not progressing, we can examine our lessons to determine why, and then alter our plans. Allowing beliefs about a model to trump our interest in the child’s progress is unfair to the child. All children deserve better.
programs are organized based on belief in a particular model, and teachers should examine the programs they use to determine the model on which it is based.

**Instructional Materials**

A former third-grade student of mine (MO) helped me to understand the importance of instructional materials—in this case the use of hardcover books instead of softcover books. We were provided multiple copies of the same text, some hardcover and others softcover. In the distribution, he was given a softcover text. Seeing this, he broke into loud sobs, saying that he couldn’t read the book. In my effort to calm him, I assured him that of course he could read the book, and I pointed out the similarities of the versions. It didn’t work. He kept crying, telling me I didn’t understand. He was correct; I didn’t understand, so I asked him to explain. He pointed out that in the softcover book, there wasn’t as much space around the sides of the page and the lines were all squished together. Taking another look at the books, I saw what he was explaining and once again had to admit that he was correct. The hardcover book appeared much easier to read because of the extra space devoted to the margins and the line spacing. The problem was resolved by letting him read from a hardcover version—which he did with ease. The point here is that instructional materials matter more than we might think. We need to pay attention to this. The materials not only should be in alignment with the teaching approach, but also entice children to read. When given the choice, students very rarely opt to read a page of print on poor quality paper over a trade book.

When a student resists reading, we need to take a look at what we are putting before the child to better understand whether this resistance is a problem with the child or a problem with the instructional materials. We then need to make any necessary changes to keep the child reading.

**The Teacher**

In the words of Albert Harris and Edward Sipay, “Teacher effectiveness has a strong influence on how well children learn to read.” Like other scholars, we could not agree more. This is one reason that we devoted Chapter 6 to the teacher’s role in a reading diagnosis and improvement program. Listed below are some teaching practices that reading educators believe contribute to reading problems:

1. Failing to ensure that students are prepared to learn the skill or strategy.
2. Using materials that are too difficult.
3. Pacing instruction either too fast or too slow.
4. Ignoring unsatisfactory reading behaviors until they become habits.
5. Rarely expecting a certain child to perform the same tasks required of others.
6. Asking questions and then answering them without giving students time to respond.
7. Failing to acknowledge students when they do try.
8. Expressing disapproval or sarcasm when a mistake is made.
9. Allowing other children to disparage another child’s efforts.
10. Expecting a child to perform a task that he or she cannot do in front of others.
11. Expecting a child to do poorly because older brothers and sisters did.

**Instructional Time**

Sometimes research is needed to prove what common sense would tell us. A case in point is instructional time. As the result of Rosenshine’s findings related to academic engaged time (i.e., the time students spend on academically relevant activities at the right level of difficulty), we now have proof that the more time students spend on a task, the higher their academic achievement will be. And, as other researchers have reported, students spend more time on task when they are engaged with the teacher. Let us always remember teacher enthusiasm! It can go a long way toward keeping students focused. When students are not receiving instruction, individual work still needs to be meaningful and engaging. Independent activities need to extend and refine their reading abilities.
School Environment
Context matters. If children feel safe, they are more likely to take the necessary risks on their way to becoming proficient readers.

Beyond safety, though, the actual physical environment of the classroom has a great influence on learning. To become readers, children need to be exposed to a lot of print and in many forms. A classroom that is full of print, such as children’s literature, magazines, brochures, and so on, sends a powerful message to students. A classroom littered with print helps demonstrate that there are many reasons to read (and write).

Diagnosed Learning Disability
Diversity in the classroom encompasses those students with learning disabilities. Fortunately, there are professionals within the school whose job it is to understand these disabilities and to help teachers plan appropriate instruction. We have put this factor last in the list of educational factors because we wish to emphasize that learning problems need to be examined beyond the learner. Oftentimes, learning problems are the result of institutional structures in the school.

NONEDUCATIONAL FACTORS

Home Environment
Socioeconomic class, parents’ education, and the neighborhood in which children live are some of the factors that shape children’s home environments. The results of studies have led researchers to conclude that the higher the socioeconomic status, the better the verbal ability of the child and the better children usually achieve in school.

Children who have good adult language models and are spoken to and encouraged to speak will have an advantage in the development of language and intelligence. Similarly, children who come from homes where there are many opportunities to read; where there are many different types of text such as magazines, encyclopedias, books, and newspapers; and where they discuss what they read with their parents will be better readers than children without these advantages.

The adult composition of the child’s home environment also has an impact on the child. Whether a child is reared by both parents, a single parent, a nanny, grandparents, or foster parents will affect the child’s attitudes and behavior. For instance, a child who is raised by a female single parent may behave differently from one raised by a male single parent. The death of one parent or of another family member will usually cause emotional stress for the child. Divorce can also be a traumatic experience for children.

Language Differences
We live in a pluralistic society. In a diagnostic approach to assessing and teaching reading, teachers must recognize that most classes will be a composite of children who speak many different languages. For example, one student might grow up with two non-English languages spoken at home (such as Spanish and Quechua), and another student in the same class may have grown up with both English and another heritage language spoken at home (such as in a Navajo community). Still others come from homes where only one language is spoken. English language learners (ELLs) from various backgrounds face unique problems in phonology, orthography, grammar, usage, and pragmatics.

The challenge teachers face is one of helping all students to value and develop their home language(s) while at the same time learning English as a new language. Spanish is an important and widespread language in the United States. And yet we do ourselves and our students a disservice when we prepare only for Spanish-English diversity. Imagine a school where 65% of parents identify their children as coming from Spanish-speaking homes, and 34% from English-speaking homes. That leaves 1% of
students who are not from either group. Good teachers learn how to design reading instruction for the 1% as well as for those speaking the dominant languages of the school population. They understand that ELLs are constantly showing what they need to know and learn, and that there is much variability among them. Good teachers do not confuse variability with disability.13

In the United States, regional dialects differ very little from each other, perhaps almost exclusively in pronunciation. We would be more likely to speak of a regional “accent” than a “dialect.”14 Children who speak a variation or dialect of English or another language are not inferior, nor is their heritage language inferior. Research by linguists has shown that many variations of English, including African American vernacular, Creoles from Caribbean islands, and Indian English, are highly structured systems and not accumulations of errors in standard American English. Labov states that “it is most important for the teacher to understand the relation between standard and nonstandard and to recognize that nonstandard English is a system of rules, different from the standard but not necessarily inferior as a means of communication.”15

We want children to be flexible language users—that is, we want to help them develop the understanding that every “club” has a language. To successfully communicate with members of any given club, one needs to speak the language of that club.

Gender
Preferences for texts are a key factor that distinguishes gender. The main problem is that male students report a shortage of texts in classrooms and school libraries that hold their interest. Both male and female students need exposure to many different types of texts that will help them to develop an identity as a reader.16

Physical Health
Illness
A child who is ill is not able to do well in school. This statement is obvious; however, it may not be obvious that a child is ill. A teacher needs to be alert for certain symptoms that may suggest a child is not well or is not getting enough sleep. For example, a child who is listless, whose eyes are glazed, who seems sleepy, and who actually does fall asleep in class may need a physical checkup.

The reason a child who is ill does not usually do well in school is not necessarily the child’s illness, but the child’s frequent absence from school. Children who have recurrent illnesses are generally absent from school a lot. This lack of attendance can contribute to reading problems because it causes the child to miss important reading instruction. In fact, such long absences, especially in first and second grade, are often the reason children struggle with reading.17

Nutrition18
The effects of nutrition, and particularly malnutrition, on learning have been evident for a long time. It should come as no surprise that children who are hungry and malnourished have difficulty learning. They cannot concentrate on the task at hand; they also lack drive. They simply lack the energy to perform at their best. For several decades some researchers have suggested that severe malnutrition in infancy may lower children’s IQ scores.19 Several other researchers have found that the lack of protein in an infant’s diet may adversely affect the child’s ability to learn.20 Still others have found that the effects of certain food additives may be a deterrent to learning for certain children.21

And consider the current state of affairs regarding nutrition. Childhood obesity is in the media spotlight; some even call it an epidemic and point to possible reasons why children are becoming obese in increasing numbers. Not surprisingly, nutrition is a major factor, as is the type of food that children consume. Is it any wonder that many children have trouble performing in school when they eat processed foods that contain a lot of sugar?22
Perceptual Factors

Vision and hearing are two key areas of perception in reading. Ruling out visual and auditory issues as factors that contribute to reading problems is important. For example, a struggling reader who also has astigmatism is at a heightened disadvantage. The same holds true for readers with auditory perception problems.

Visual Perception

Sometimes children have difficulty reading because they need glasses. Yet visual problems are not always obvious and, as a result, are not always detected (see Figure 2.1). Most schools have some kind of visual screening. The most common screening is for myopia, or nearsightedness. The Snellen chart test is usually done by the school nurse. In this familiar test, a child must identify letters of various sizes with each eye. A score of 20/20 is considered normal. A score of 20/40 or 20/60 means that a child has defective vision because the child with normal vision can see the letters at a distance of forty or sixty feet, whereas the child with defective vision can only see these letters at a distance of twenty feet. Other tests are used to identify farsightedness (hypermetropia) and astigmatism.

Auditory Perception

Sometimes children have difficulty reading because of hearing problems. Most schools have some sort of audiology screening that is administered in primary grades. These

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**FIGURE 2.1  Symptoms of Vision Problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The child . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Complains of constant headaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Eyes show some of the following: red rims, swollen lids, crusted lids, redness, frequent sties, watering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Squints while reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Asks to sit closer to the board</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Can’t seem to sit still while doing close-up tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Holds reading material very close to face when reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Skips many words and/or sentences when reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Makes many reversals when reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Confuses letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Avoids reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mouths words or lip-reads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Confuses similar words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Makes many repetitions while reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Skips lines while reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Has difficulty remembering what was read silently</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tests check for hearing acuity and hearing loss. School audiologists have the ability to follow up with tests on phonological processing, binaurality, and masking.

For children who speak languages other than English at home, the acquisition of speech sounds for any given language is learned very early in life and is usually established before the child starts school. Distinguishing among English phonemes may be difficult for these children, especially at the beginning of English language learning.

**Emotional Well-Being**

Self-concept, learned helplessness, motivation, and attitude are four aspects related to emotional health. Each needs to be considered when thinking about a child’s emotional well-being and how it can affect reading performance.

**Self-Concept**

Self-concept is the way an individual feels about himself or herself. Although the verdict is still out on specific origins of self-concept, our lives are a testament to the fact that it exists and that it can change depending on the task at hand. For example, if we feel adequate, confident, and self-reliant about reading, we are more apt to be good readers. We would say that we have a positive self-concept as it relates to reading. However, if we are feeling less than adequate, have little confidence, and are not self-reliant about reading, we are more likely to be poor at reading and to have a negative self-concept about it. One factor to consider, then, is how children feel about themselves as readers. This can be discovered with a student interview.

**Learned Helplessness**

Related to self-concept is learned helplessness. When learners repeatedly experience failure at a task regardless of how hard they try, they are apt to develop the idea that they simply cannot perform the task; this is called learned helplessness. As a result, any time they are expected to perform the task, they become passive and wait for help. Children who feel that they simply cannot perform well at reading are likely to show avoidance behaviors. The important point to keep in mind is that learned helplessness is the child’s viewpoint. Giving students many success opportunities over weeks and months of time will help change this viewpoint to one of competence and confidence.

**Motivation**

Like Paris and Carpenter, we believe there are several components that facilitate motivation to read. These include how readers perceive their ability to read, the text, the reason for reading, and the surrounding environment. Take, for example, children who attend a sleepover at school and are told to bring their favorite book for reading and sharing with others. Children who elect to attend the event are sure to be motivated to read. After all, they get to choose the text with the purpose in mind. Self-selection means that they are likely to pick out a text they feel they can read with ease. They need not be embarrassed when they share a part of it aloud with another person. Likewise, because everyone will be reading, the environment encourages all children to do the same. The child who chooses not to follow suit will be the odd one out and is likely to feel uncomfortable.

**Attitude**

If we simply take a look at ourselves and our relationship to reading, we can fully understand what researchers have concluded over the years: Attitude is a major factor that affects reading performance. In fact, a positive attitude can override missing skills, enabling a reader to perform far better than expected based on past reading performances. A former student of mine (MO) helped me to understand this. She selected a book that presented many challenges for her—too many from my perspective. As much as I tried to persuade her to read other, easier texts, she kept returning to “her” book and simply would not give it up. For whatever reason, she wanted to read the book and, after continual assistance, she read it with ease. What seemed like a miracle was a positive attitude in action. Deep down, she wanted to read the book and felt that she could get it, and so she did. Excited about her newfound reading ability, I wondered whether she could read other texts at a similar level of complexity. My subsequent observations revealed that she could not. In fact, she often chose to read much easier books after she did a repeated reading of her more difficult book.
REVISITING THE OPENING SCENARIO

Having read about several factors that can affect reading, return to the scenario at the beginning of the chapter. Which of the factors discussed might be affecting each of these girls? Which factors are educational and which are noneducational?

AUTHORS’ SUMMARY

Having read the chapter, let’s revisit the outcomes stated at the beginning of this chapter. Before reading our summary statements for each outcome, we suggest that you read the outcome and summarize it for yourself. Once finished, cross-check your response with our brief summary to determine how well you recalled the major points.

2.1 Differentiate between educational and noneducational factors that affect reading performance.

- There are many different factors that can impact children’s reading performance. One way of thinking about these factors is to put them into two categories: educational and noneducational. Educational factors are those that come under the domain or control of the educational system. Noneducational factors do not come under the domain or control of the educational system and often cannot be influenced by it.

- Regardless of how one chooses to classify the factors, the most important point to consider is that there are many interrelated factors that impact reading growth and that any combination of them can and do exist. Looking at a variety of factors rather than one single factor is central to the diagnostic approach and critical to advance the growth of readers.

2.2 List and describe educational factors that can impact reading growth.

- Educational factors in learning are those that come under the domain or control of the education system. These factors include teaching methods, instructional materials, the teacher, instructional time, and the school environment.

- When reading growth seems to be thwarted, there can be a tendency to see the lack as child-centered, when in fact educational factors can be major contributors to this lack of growth. For example, if children learn in a more holistic manner yet are taught in a piece-meal fashion, they may not be able to make sense of the instruction. Therefore, they fail to learn the content. In yet another example, if the classroom context is such that children feel threatened or unsafe, they are less likely to take the necessary risks to become competent readers. Although it takes courage, teachers must look at educational factors to discover and address the direct or indirect influence these factors have on reading growth.

2.3 List and explain noneducational factors that can impact reading growth.

- Noneducational factors in learning are those that do not come under the domain or control of the educational system and often cannot be influenced by it. These factors include home environment, dialect and language differences, intelligence, gender, physical health, perceptual factors, and emotional well-being.

- Teachers can do nothing about noneducational factors such as home environment, family makeup, or languages and dialects. However, becoming aware of the environments in which their children live enables teachers to provide experiences at school that either enhance or enrich their children’s learning experiences and contribute to their reading growth. For some noneducational factors, schools take an active part. For example, being mindful of nutrition and emotional well-being is essential because both are basic needs of all learners. Children who are well-nourished, have a high sense of self-efficacy, are motivated, and have a positive attitude about reading and themselves as readers stand a much better chance of becoming proficient readers. Schools take an active part when they provide breakfast and lunch programs, summer programming, and clearly defined opportunities for physical activity.
Chapter 2  Factors That Affect Reading Performance

SUGGESTED THOUGHT QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. You have been asked to give a talk to your colleagues about why there are more reading disabilities among boys than among girls in the United States. What will you say?
2. How could the community be considered an educational factor that could affect children’s reading positively?
3. Imagine a child who has multiple noneducational factors impeding her reading success. How would you determine all the contributing factors?
4. A colleague is throwing up her hands in despair over her class’s reading problems. Many of her students have multiple noneducational factors that impact their reading. Explain how she can balance out noneducational factors by strengthening educational factors.
5. There are many educational and noneducational factors that could affect reading success. Think of others that go beyond those already listed, and describe how they would affect reading.

WEBSITES

• http://bookadventure.com/
  Although primarily devoted to children, this site also provides information for parents and teachers. For children, this site offers book lists, quizzes, and prizes, addressing external motivational factors. For teachers, the site presents activities and resources for engaging young readers.
• http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/
  This site provides information about the five components of reading and the difficulties occurring in each area. Within each section, the component is defined and described as to what the problem looks like from students’, parents’, and teachers’ perspectives.
• http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/otherissues
  This page includes information on noneducational factors affecting reading, including processing (auditory processing, phonological processing, and language processing), memory, attention, and English language learning.
• http://kidsreads.com/features/great-books-boys.asp
  This site provides an extensive list of books for boys. Included are series titles and stand-alone fiction that cover a variety of genres: fantasies, mysteries, thrillers, action/adventure novels, and historical fiction. Although many of these selections also will appeal to girls, they are especially geared toward capturing the attention of boys, who are often much more reluctant readers.

ENDNOTES

1. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Report of the National Reading Panel, Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000).