Read to be Ready

A vision for third-grade reading proficiency in Tennessee

Tennessee Department of Education | September 2016

Introduction

Third grade is a critical year for students academically. Research has repeatedly found that students who are reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade are likely to continue to read proficiently as they move upward through grade levels. Similarly, and more alarmingly, we've learned that the majority of students who are reading below grade level at the end of third grade stay below grade level throughout their schooling (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). With quality resources and intense interventions these students can catch up, but they face a steep climb. It is with this sense of urgency that we seek to better define what it means for a student to read proficiently and to be prepared for the rigors of future grade levels, as well as better understand the kind of highly-effective instructional practices that enable students to develop both proficient reading habits and a lifelong love for reading (Gambrell, Malloy, Marinak, & Mazzoni, 2015).

We believe that if all stakeholders—teachers, school leaders, parents, state officials—share a specific understanding of what it takes to read proficiently and the kind of reading instruction required to get there, that we can make more strategic and aligned decisions about how to best support our students. Together, we can ensure that all of our students are proficient and thoughtful readers who are ready for postsecondary and career success.

Vision Authors

In the fall of 2015, the Tennessee Department of Education convened an Early Literacy Council composed of educators from across the state representing diverse points of view, including teachers, instructional coaches, principals, district leaders, and university professors. The council's primary charge was to establish a vision for third grade reading proficiency that would focus and anchor the department's various literacy initiatives. Council members include:

- Kerri Newsom – Teacher, Dyersburg City Schools
- Jennifer Jordan – District Leader, Lauderdale County Schools
- Adrianne Sublett – Instructional Coach, Shelby County Schools
- Dr. Rachel Peay Cornett – Interventionist, Rutherford County Schools
- Dr. Penelope Thompson – District Leader, Lebanon Special School District
- Dr. Deborah Rowe – Professor, Vanderbilt University
- Dr. Tammy Lipsey – District Leader, Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Mary Pitner – Principal, Bedford County Schools
- Janet Sexton – District Leader, Knox County Schools
- Ron Hughes – Principal, Hamilton County Schools
- Christy Grubb – Teacher, Sevier County Schools
- Dr. Anne McGill-Franzen – Professor, University of Tennessee-Knoxville
- Dr. Tracy McAbee – Principal, Polk County Schools

- Tiffany Hogan – Instructional Coach, Johnson City Schools
- Autumn Turner – District Leader, Warren County Schools

The council was chaired by Karen Babbs Hollett, the department's director of teacher training and support, with oversight from Commissioner Candice McQueen and Chief Academic Officer Vicki Kirk. Additional department staff representing the Office of Early Learning, the Division of Special Populations, and the Centers of Regional Excellence (CORE) served as ex-officio council members. Dr. Victoria Risko, Professor Emerita at Vanderbilt University and a consultant with the department, also played a significant role in the council's work.

While the vision for reading proficiency was primarily influenced by the ideas and recommendations of the Early Literacy Council, the department also considered analysis of state achievement test data, prevailing research in the field of effective literacy instruction, and the demands of the Tennessee Academic Standards.

Vision for Reading Proficiency

Reading is a complex act, and defining reading proficiency is a complex task (Pearson Raphael, Benson, & Madda, C.L., 2007). Reducing reading proficiency to a test score or assessment designation isn't appropriate given the demands and nuances of the task, nor is it realistic when we consider the incredible real-world relevance of reading. The definition presented below offers an encompassing view of what reading proficiency means, while striving to make pragmatic connections to instructional practice.

Proficient reading is all about making meaning from text. To do this, readers must accurately, fluently, and independently read a wide range of appropriately-complex texts; strategically employ comprehension strategies to analyze key ideas and information; construct interpretations and arguments through speaking and writing; develop vocabulary; and build knowledge about the world.

By the end of third grade, proficient readers read and comprehend a wide range of text types of increasing difficulty, including both narrative and informational texts. They accurately and independently decode text, reading with a rate and level of expression that promotes comprehension. Proficient readers recognize when to employ specific comprehension strategies in service of their understanding with a focus on the text's central ideas or themes. Readers select comprehension strategies strategically, based on the unique structure, topic, and demands of the text (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2013).

Proficient readers analyze, critique, and synthesize text information for multiple purposes, with the end goal of deeply understanding what they read. They generate inferences, interpretations, conclusions, and arguments that are supported by textual evidence and are also informed by their own background knowledge. They communicate these ideas in both formal and informal settings through speaking and writing. As a result of attentive engagement with texts, proficient readers build their historical, cultural, and disciplinary knowledge. They use this robust knowledge bank to make connections across topics and settings and enhance their understanding of new ideas.

In summary, the goal of proficient reading is to comprehend the meaning of content-rich and complex texts in a way that builds readers' understanding of language and literacy, draws on and improves their abilities as both speakers and writers, and increases their knowledge of the world around them, making them smarter and more empathetic global citizens while preparing them for postsecondary and career success (Pearson & Cervetti, 2013).

Skills-Based and Knowledge-Based Literacy Competencies

Another way of describing reading proficiency is the simultaneous development of skills-based and knowledge-based literacy competencies. In other words, reading proficiency means that students are learning to read <u>while</u> reading to learn.

Skills-based competencies include many of the competencies traditionally looked to for reading success: alphabet knowledge, fluency, and word reading. Knowledge-based competencies are about comprehension or making meaning. They focus on the ability to understand and express complex ideas through knowledge of concepts, vocabulary, and reasoning.

The key insight is that both skills- and knowledge-based competencies are vitally important, and neither serves as the foundation for the other. Skills-based competencies are necessary but not sufficient for early literacy development; later reading comprehension and academic success depend mostly on strong knowledge-based competencies (Language Diversity and Literacy Development Research Group, Harvard University, 2012).
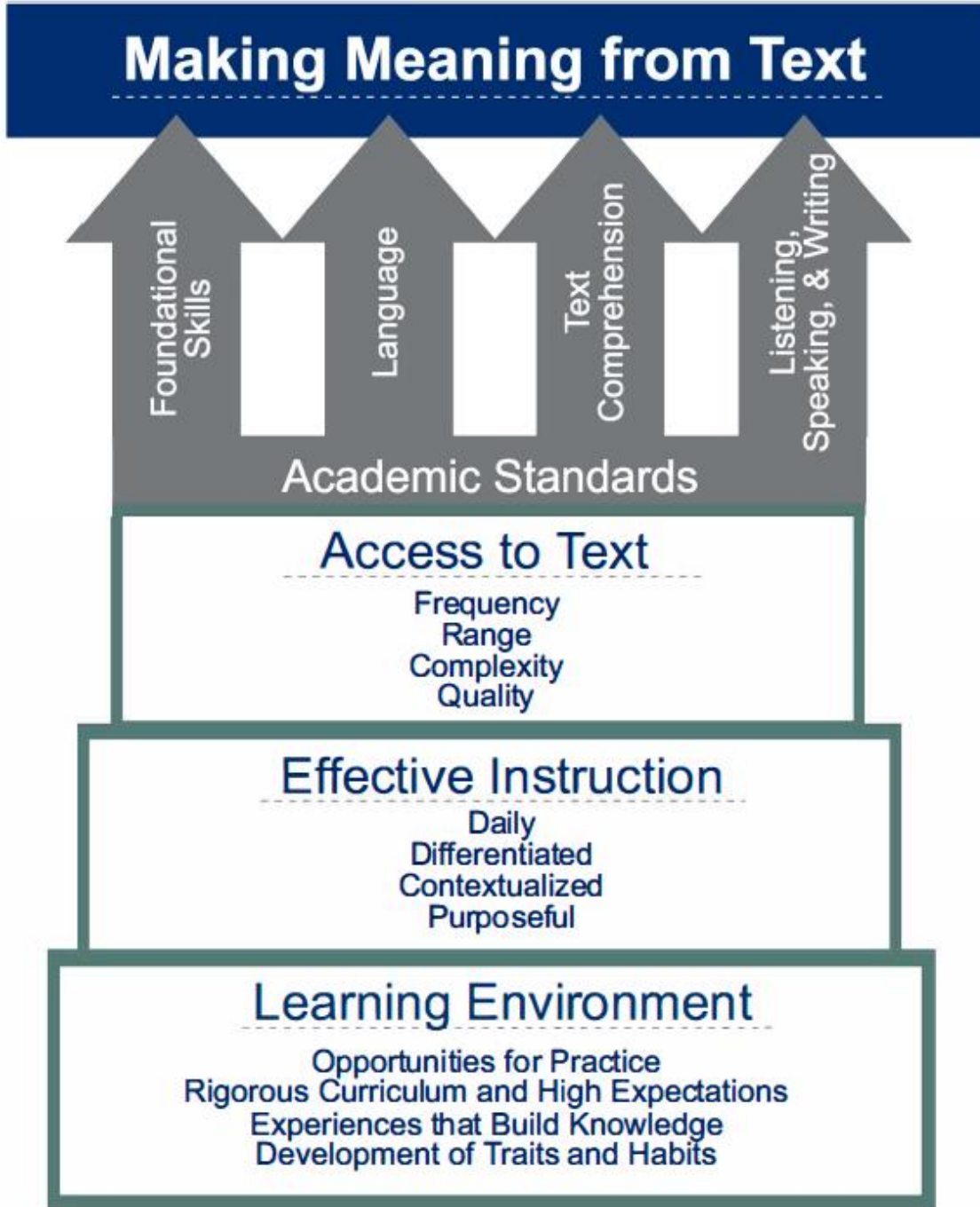
Grade-Span Relevance

While the Early Literacy Council was charged with creating a vision of reading proficiency that set specific expectations for third grade, the council found that many of the skills, habits, and knowledge structures required for proficient reading at third grade remain true for readers throughout the K–12 grade span. Fluent reading, application of reading strategies, argumentation, and vocabulary and knowledge development are critical for readers at all levels, and the council encourages all educators to consider the relevance of this vision to their work, regardless of the age or grade of students they serve.

The council would also like to specifically clarify the significance of this vision for early grades educators. For this vision to be realized in third grade, it must first take root in kindergarten, with students continuing to grow into it throughout first, second, and third grade. Early grades educators must invest in building students' knowledge and skill simultaneously, expanding vocabulary, engaging students with a wide range of texts, and developing students' listening, speaking, and writing abilities.

Making the Vision a Reality

The end goal and defining trait of reading proficiency is students' ability to make meaning from text and, through that meaning-making process, build knowledge about the world around them. A symphony of related factors supports students in achieving this outcome. All factors are significant, connected, and should be present throughout students' K–3 learning experience. These factors are depicted in the graphic below, and are further explained in the upcoming sections of this document.

Making Meaning from Text

Foundational Skills · Language · Text Comprehension · Listening, Speaking, & Writing

Academic Standards

Access to Text
Frequency
Range
Complexity
Quality

Effective Instruction
Daily
Differentiated
Contextualized
Purposeful

Learning Environment
Opportunities for Practice
Rigorous Curriculum and High Expectations
Experiences that Build Knowledge
Development of Traits and Habits

Integration of Academic Standards

For students to achieve this vision of reading proficiency, they need purposeful, targeted, and standards-aligned instruction. Here, we recognize four important domains of instruction that support reading proficiency and should be developed in a K–3 literacy curriculum. Each domain on its own is critical; however, all four are interrelated and collectively support students in becoming skillful readers who can comprehend and thoughtfully respond to texts. Each domain aligns to a strand or group of strands of the Tennessee Academic Standards.
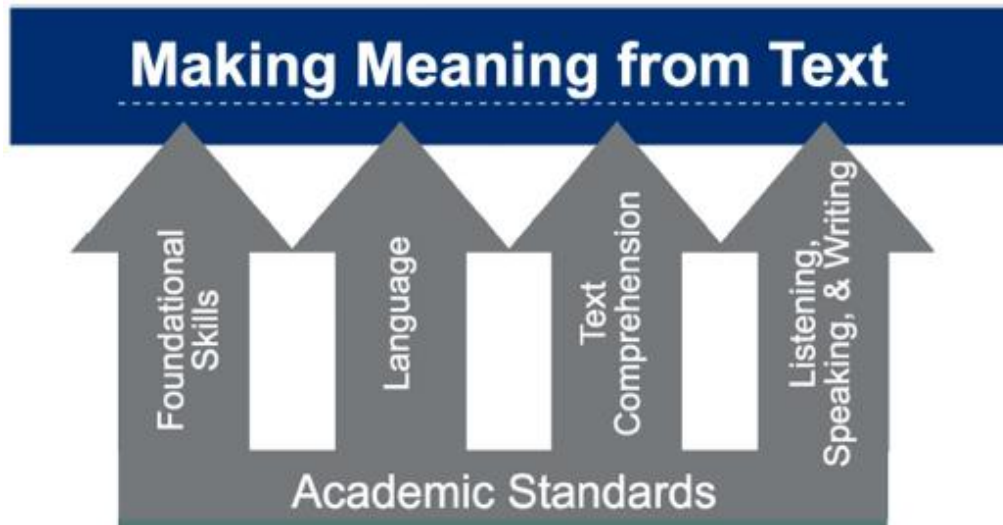
- **Foundational Skills** include the specific development of concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, word composition, fluency, sentence composition, and early vocabulary acquisition.
  - Proficient readers accurately and automatically recognize the symbols and sounds of print and put them together to form words. They recognize a large range of high-frequency words by sight, and they read with appropriate rate, accuracy, and expression that supports their comprehension. As students become more automatic in their application of these skills, less cognitive energy is given to word recognition and students can focus their thinking on the key ideas and details, craft and structure, and overall meaning of texts (Paris, 2005; Gehsmann & Templeton, 2013). Additionally, proficient readers make connections between decoding and encoding, grammar and speech, and develop foundational written and oral communication skills.
  - These foundational skills are part of a comprehensive reading program focused on developing readers as active learners who apply these skills to support their reading comprehension.

- **Language** includes breadth and precision of vocabulary, knowledge of language structures, and conventions of Standard English.
    - Proficient readers possess a breadth of vocabulary that allows them to recognize and apply a wide range of Tier II and Tier III[1] vocabulary words both in and out of context (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). They also possess a clear understanding of the precise meaning of words and are able to select words specifically and appropriately based on context. This breadth and precision of vocabulary is developed through frequent conversations with peers and adults (Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2008), by reading widely about a range of topics, and through diverse experiences that introduce concepts and build knowledge (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2009).
    - Additionally, proficient readers have a knowledge of language structures, including syntax, knowledge of word parts, and a general understanding of the conventions of English. This knowledge of language structure supports readers in determining the meaning of unknown words, breaking down complex sentences or paragraphs, and recognizing how authors convey meaning through the craft and structure of their writing. They apply their knowledge of language to determine how language functions in different contexts, and to choose language structures that support their intentions for communication.
- **Text Comprehension** includes a readers' ability to apply comprehension strategies while reading literary and informational texts, as well as their knowledge of diverse text structures.
    - Proficient readers possess the metacognitive skills to know when to apply various comprehension strategies, such as when they have a question, when their comprehension is disrupted, or when they recognize a section of text that is particularly dense or significant. These comprehension strategies include, but aren't limited to, predicting, inferring, summarizing, asking and answering questions while reading, and visualizing. As a result of frequent and authentic reading experiences, proficient readers are able to apply these comprehension strategies fluidly and skillfully in a way that improves and confirms understanding (Duke & Pearson, 2002).
    - Proficient readers also possess knowledge of text structures. They know the essential traits of various genres and can anticipate what type of background knowledge to reference, what kind of vocabulary to recall, and which comprehension strategies to access based on the unique demands of the text.

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[1] Tier II words are the words of mature language users, are more commonly found in texts than in everyday speech, and are used across content areas. Tier II words include *endure, established*, and *principle*. Tier III words are specific to certain content areas or domains and are essential for deep study of that field. Tier III words include *molecule, diaspora*, and *algorithm*.

- **Listening, Speaking, and Writing** include the Tennessee Academic Standards related to language processes and represent a reader's ability to comprehend and produce ideas in varied forms. Proficient readers are also proficient listeners, speakers, and writers; each skill is reciprocal and foundational to building new knowledge and responding to authentic problems (Howland, Jonassen, & Marra, 2013).
    - Proficient readers integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, synthesize ideas, draw interpretations, and form conclusions. Proficient readers evaluate speakers' point of view, logic and reasoning, and use of evidence and supporting ideas.
    - Proficient readers participate effectively in a wide range of speaking and writing formats; they organize information to build arguments; they evaluate and synthesize information; they support their point of view with evidence; and they tell stories, write poetry, and entertain. Proficient readers are effective users of digital and visual media and access these forms of communication to support their reasoning and presentations.
    - Proficient readers speak and write about a range of topics and present their understandings in diverse settings using varied forms of expression (Gillam & Reutzel, 2013).
    - Proficient readers thoughtfully respond to text-based speaking and writing tasks. They speak and write about the content and ideas of the texts they read through informational and opinion pieces, and also seek guidance from mentor texts when creating narrative works. While an emphasis is placed on text-related writing, students also produce other forms of writing that are self-generated.

These four instructional domains have been categorized for the sake of clarification and emphasis: the fact that they have been distinguished from one another should not be taken as an indication that these groups of standards should be taught in isolation. To the contrary, foundational skills, language, text comprehension, speaking, listening, and writing are integrated skills that are best developed when taught in relationship to one another.

Access to Text

For students to become proficient readers, literacy standards must be learned and applied within the authentic contexts of reading and writing, as well as within an environment where the application and integration of skills and strategies are supported (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015).
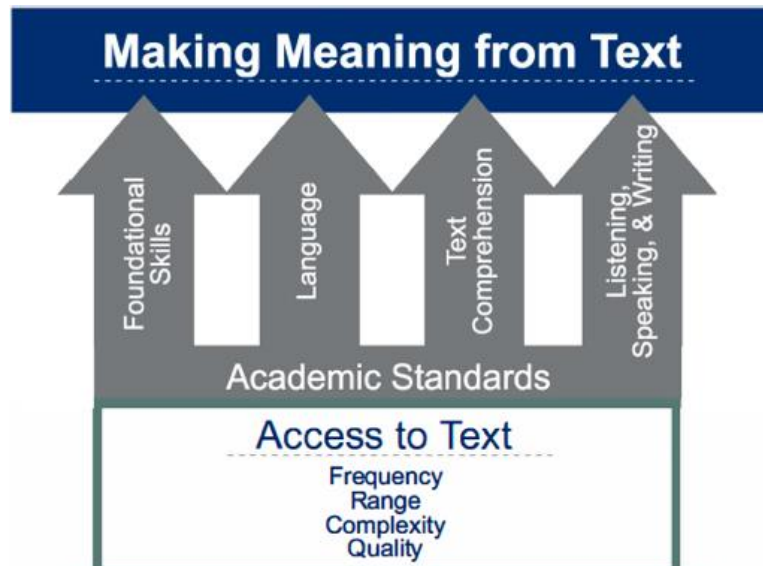
Students become better readers by reading, and it is critical for students to spend a large percentage of their day reading, listening to, and responding to texts. According to an observational study of K–2 literacy lessons in Tennessee conducted in the fall of 2015, students spent only 20 percent of time engaged in text. This reality conflicts with research that shows that the most successful readers spend the majority of their literacy lesson time reading, listening to, discussing, or writing about texts (Allington, 2013). Increasing the **frequency** of time students spend engaging with texts is a critical first step in building reading proficiency.

In addition to time spent with text, the content and quality of the text is also significant. When selecting text to support proficient reading, three criteria should be considered:

- **Text Complexity** refers to a text's level of difficulty. To become proficient readers, students must listen to, read, and attend to texts that represent developmentally-appropriate measures of quantitative and qualitative complexities. Frequent reading of texts with high quantitative complexity prepares students for the high-Lexile texts they will encounter in postsecondary and the technically demanding texts often associated with the workforce. Texts that are qualitatively complex present multiple levels of meaning, irregular text structures, unconventional language, and other stylistic features that require the reader to read closely and think critically. It's important for students to interact with collections of texts that represent various measures of complexity so that,

over time, they get the exposure and practice needed to make sense of and produce all kinds of text types and structures.

- **Text Quality** means that students read and listen to high-quality and content-rich texts that are worthy of their time and attention, that exhibit exceptional craft and thought, and that provide useful information. High-quality literary texts possess complex plot, round characters, thematically rich issues, rich language, and engaging illustrations (Hoffman, Teale, & Yokota, 2015). Content-rich informational texts include new, relevant, and useful information with real-world utility, and help readers answer questions, solve problems, and connect ideas, while promoting further exploration and inquiry. Engaging with high-quality mentor texts develops students' understanding of presentation and argumentation and helps them to improve their own writing.
- **Range of Reading** refers to the diverse types of texts that students read and listen to. Students should be given opportunities to engage with a wide range of topics and text types from literary and informational genres as well as texts from technical fields. Through extensive listening to and reading of complex literary texts, including stories, dramas, poems, and myths from diverse cultures and time periods, students gain literary and cultural knowledge as well as familiarity with various text structures and elements. By listening to and reading complex texts in history, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that gives them the background knowledge to be better readers in all content areas. In addition to complex texts that are above their grade level, students should be given regular opportunities to read appropriately complex, high-quality, and interesting texts on their instructional and independent levels. In addition to supporting comprehension, texts on these levels encourage fluency development and application of foundational skills, and also build readers' motivation and stamina.

Additionally, texts should be selected with attention to building topic and theme-based knowledge through the thoughtful assembly of text sets. By studying a singular topic or theme over time through various texts and genres, students build deep understanding, have repeated opportunities to acquire and practice vocabulary, and are given space to ask and answer more nuanced questions and engage in more complex problem solving and inquiry.

Quantitative and Qualitative Text Complexity

Quantitative complexity includes word length, word frequency, word difficulty, sentence length, and overall text cohesion. Quantitative text complexity is typically measured by computer software.

Qualitative complexity includes the levels of meaning within a text, the text's structure and organization, the conventionality and clarity of the text's language, and the prior knowledge expectations the text places on the reader. Specific examples of high qualitative complexity include texts where the narrator is unreliable, when the temporal sequence of the text is non-traditional (e.g., frequent flashbacks between the present and past), the use of unfamiliar vernacular in dialog, or when the setting of the text is an unfamiliar or unique time and place. Qualitative text complexity is best measured by teachers who employ professional judgment and knowledge of their students and the subject matter.

Effective Instruction

It's essential that texts are made accessible to all students, regardless of their decoding ability, background knowledge, primary language, current interest in reading, or any other variable. Effective literacy instruction that is accessible and engaging should be guided, scaffolded, and differentiated and should occur daily. Lessons and skills should be contextualized using authentic text examples, and responses to text should also be authentic and purposeful.
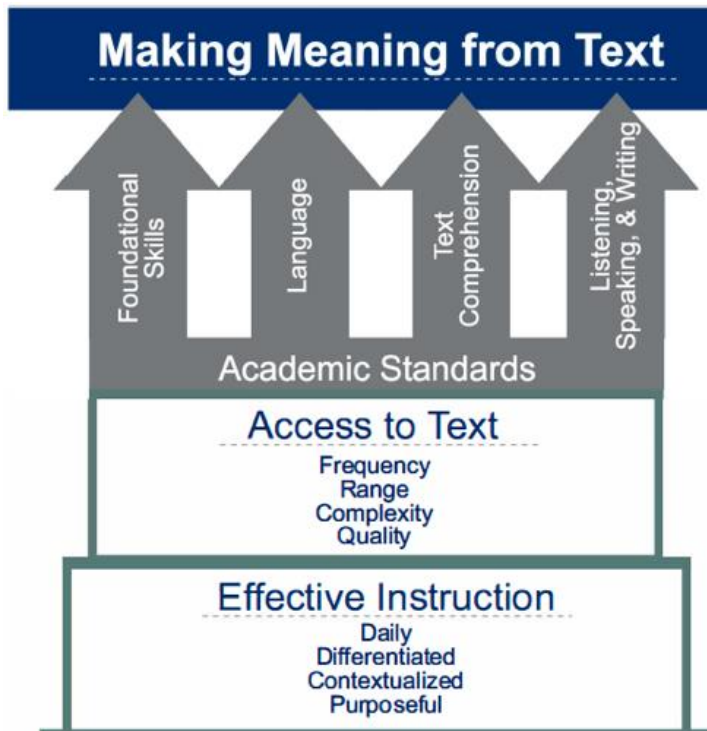
Students need **regular, daily practice** with complex texts (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003), texts that are on their grade level, texts that are on their instructional level or within their zone of proximal development, as well as texts that are on their independent reading level and that are of their choosing (Pearson, 2013). Limited access to a wide range of texts and more challenging texts can limit the trajectory toward proficiency (Chall & Jacobs, 2003).

Engagement with texts should occur within instructional settings that provide appropriate levels of support given the demands of the text, such as interactive read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and reading workshops. Instruction should not be compartmentalized (e.g., writing is taught only on Tuesday and Thursday); rather, students should meaningfully practice many standards and skills through various texts and experiences every day.

Effective literacy lessons provide explicit instruction that models and guides self-monitoring and the strategic use of learned skills and strategies to comprehend texts and build knowledge. It is differentiated and responsive to students' needs, not teaching what students already know but

building on students' background knowledge to support connections to new knowledge (Snow & O'Connor, 2013). Literacy teachers proactively **differentiate** instruction, thoughtfully considering the content, process, and products of their lessons.

While attending to students' needs, effective literacy instruction also considers students' strengths. Effective lessons capitalize on students' prior knowledge and lived experiences (e.g., their early literacy learning situated in book sharing events, storytelling, and language interactions) and engages students in authentic applications of concepts and literacy skills. Students develop their emerging literacy skills proactively through **contextualized** reading and writing activities, perhaps learning new ideas in isolated settings, but always applying those ideas in the context of authentic texts and responses. Students are asked to read and write in **purposeful**, meaningful, and authentic ways—they read and write with the intent of answering questions, solving problems, constructing arguments, pursuing interests, or building new knowledge.

This type of purposeful instruction grounded in real-world utility is not only interesting and engaging for students, it supports the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills students will need to be successful in postsecondary and the workforce (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015).

Developmental Appropriateness

Students must regularly participate in literacy instruction that is based in complex texts and encourages complex thinking and problem solving. However, it is important for educators to construct rigorous learning opportunities that are mindful of developmental stages and appropriate for students' age and experiences. Texts and tasks should be differentiated and developmentally appropriate and designed for student success, even while pushing students to think deeply and apply their learning in complex ways.

Technology Literacies

While this vision for reading proficiency focuses on English language arts standards, a broader view of literacy encompasses understanding and proficiencies in a range of other fields, such as occupational literacies and cultural literacies. Here, we want to identify the importance of **technology literacies** for young readers, and the connections between technology literacies, ELA standards, 21st century skills, and overall college and career readiness.

The Tennessee Academic Standards for Computer Technology: Literacy and Usage include the following expectations for all grade levels K–8.

- Standard 1.0 – Students will understand basic operations and concepts of technology
- Standard 2.0 – Students will understand the importance of social, ethical, and human issues associated with technology
- Standard 3.0 – Students will use technology productivity tools
- Standard 4.0 – Students will use technology communications tools
- Standard 5.0 – Students will select and use appropriate technology research tools
- Standard 6.0 – Students will utilize technology problem-solving and decision-making tools

These overarching standards are differentiated by grade level and support this vision for reading proficiency by emphasizing knowledge and skills such as: keyboarding skills; using a variety of media and technology resources for directed and independent learning activities; preparing and producing creative works; communicating information and ideas effectively with multiple audiences; and, locating and evaluating information from a range of sources.

Learning Environment

Effective standards-based instruction that authentically integrates reading and writing is critical for developing proficient readers. We recognize that for teachers to initiate and sustain this kind of classroom instruction, additional structural and cultural supports are needed to create a broader learning environment that promotes rich learning and understanding. The following traits should be cultivated in all learning environments, at the classroom, school, and community level.
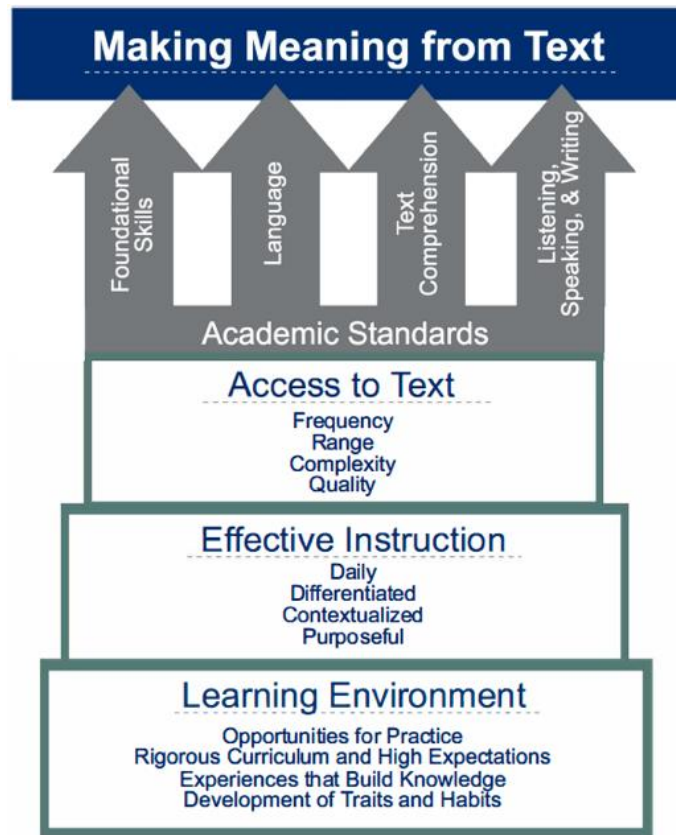
- **Opportunities for Authentic Practice** to regularly and purposefully listen to, read, and view high-quality authentic texts and media. Instructional tasks are designed to mimic real-world expectations, such as work students may be asked to do in a high school or postsecondary classroom or as a member of the workforce, with a focus on critical thinking, reasoning, and expression of ideas through speaking and writing (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). Classwork should be connected to real-world events whenever possible, and students should be encouraged to practice their learning in a range of authentic settings (e.g., reading menus in a cafeteria or restaurant, writing to the school principal to suggest school improvements, writing a letter to a favorite author, researching the best habitat for a class pet, etc.).
- **Rigorous Curriculum and High Expectations** are necessary for providing students with challenging work and opportunities for productive struggle. To become proficient

readers, all students must have access to complex, appropriately-differentiated on-grade level and above-grade level texts, as well as texts that they can read successfully on their instructional and independent reading levels. Similarly, students must receive regular practice with demanding instructional tasks that push them to think critically about texts, their ideas, and their real-world implications. Curricula should emphasize higher-level thinking and activities should hold students accountable to creating well-constructed ideas or claims and supporting them with precise evidence. Rigorous curricula must also be paired with high expectations—simply put, we must give students hard work and believe that they can do it.

- **Develop Traits and Habits,** sometimes called non-cognitive skills, soft skills, or executive function, are the attitudes, behaviors, and strategies that support learning and personal growth. Traits and habits should be modeled and encouraged by teachers, leaders, and community members and recognized as a valued piece of students' learning and development. Examples of specific traits and habits that support proficient reading are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list, and educators, families, and communities should work together to determine additional essential traits, habits, and life skills students need to be successful within their unique environments and cultures.
    - The **traits** of critical and creative thinking allow students to think flexibly about what they read, consider various points of view, analyze various examples of text evidence to make inferences, and draw connections between and across diverse sources (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015). Persistence enables students to confidently attempt to decode difficult and unfamiliar words, reread a text multiple times to comprehend multiple layers of meaning, and engage in productive struggle when making sense of new ideas presented within texts (Guthrie, 2015). Additional academically productive traits include self-monitoring, empathy, resilience, and the ability to set and reach goals.
    - Specific reading-related **habits** also promote proficiency. For example, proficient readers regularly read a variety of texts with stamina and focus. They are able to read independently for a sustained period of time; they express curiosity when reading by regularly asking questions; they seek to learn from and collaborate with peers when discussing texts; and they share their thinking and questions with clarity and confidence. Proficient readers develop an interest in text and an understanding of the power and influence of reading and writing. They seek texts for a range of purposes, including to answer their own questions about the world, to pursue areas of interest, and for entertainment.
- **Experiences that Build Knowledge** are essential for students to comprehend complex texts, which frequently demand a broad and deep bank of pre-existing knowledge. Proficient readers are able to pull from a rich bank of background knowledge, including knowledge of vocabulary, to decode words and understand the meaning of texts. Within a learning environment that supports proficiency, readers are given opportunities to

add to their knowledge bank by listening to and reading texts on myriad topics and by connecting information from texts to real world experiences, such as reading a text about reptiles and then observing them at a zoo, or reading a history text and then visiting a local monument or memorial to learn more about a specific event (Pearson & Cervetti, 2013). Proficient readers possess a robust oral vocabulary that assists them in word recognition. This kind of vocabulary is developed through frequent conversations with adults and peers about a range of topics, experiences that introduce new words and phrases, and exchanges in print and language-rich environments (van den Broek et al., 2011). Proficient readers benefit from opportunities to dialog about texts, to respond to open-ended questions that invite thinking, reasoning, and elaboration, and from encouragement to read and explore various forms of text and media (Soter et al., 2008).

- **Cultural Responsiveness** acknowledges and affirms the unique identities, experiences, and knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom. In a responsive learning environment, educators capitalize on students' existing knowledge, questions, literacy experiences, language interactions, and meaning making experiences as resources for making connections to new knowledge (McIntyre, Hulan, & Layne, 2011). Students have opportunities to read and write texts that affirm their individual identities and the identities of their communities. For example, students have opportunities to read stories that feature protagonists who look like them, who share their abilities and disabilities, and who go through similar experiences as them, and are steered away from texts that reinforce unproductive stereotypes about persons or communities. Culturally responsive texts promote positive and expansive worldviews and foster an understanding, acceptance, and interest in characters and places that are different or unfamiliar (Morrison, Robbins, & Rose, 2008).

Closing

The Tennessee Department of Education and the Early Literacy Council encourage educators to reflect on their current approach to literacy instruction, to celebrate current practices that promote reading proficiency, and to evaluate critically where they can most improve.

The department is equally committed to this kind of reflection and improvement and is excited to continue to support Tennessee schools in improving reading results for students through a range of initiatives.

Authentic Reading and Writing in Practice: Classroom Vignette

Students in Ms. Jackson's second grade class begin a two-week, text-centered interdisciplinary unit on plants, based on the following science standards:

- 0207.1.1 – Recognize that plants and animals are made up of smaller parts and use food, water, and air to survive.
- 0207.2.2 – Investigate living things found in different places.
- 0207.2.3 – Identify basic ways that plants and animals depend on each other.
- 0207.Inq.2 – Ask questions, make logical predications, plan investigations, and represent data.
- 0207.Inq.3 – Explain the data from an investigation.

Based on the multiple texts she selects for this unit, Ms. Jackson plans to anchor her instruction in the following reading standards:
- 2.RL.3 – Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
- 2.RL.4 – Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.
- 2.RI.1 – Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details I a text.
- 2.RI.4 – Determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 2 topic or subject area.
- 2.RI.9 – Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.

Observations Connected to Complex Texts with Read Aloud and Shared Reading Instruction

Students begin their unit by visiting a small school garden that was planted by previous students. They walk around the garden and talk about the different kinds of plants they see. Back in the classroom, Ms. Jackson asks them what they noticed about the plants and to identify the ones that seemed interesting to them and why. As students generate their observations in a guided discussion, Ms. Jackson records their ideas on a chart titled "Our Observations." Their ideas include: some plants have flowers; some plants, such as the carrots, will have food that people and animals can eat; and, some plants are tall with many leaves and others have only a few leaves.

Then, Ms. Jackson reads aloud the informational text *From Seed to Plant* by Gail Gibbons. Students discuss what they learned from the text and this information is added to another

section of the chart titled "Our New Knowledge." In a separate column, titled "Our Questions," students generate questions they still have about types of plants and how they grow. Students will continue to add to this chart throughout their unit of study. Ms. Jackson will return to the book *From Seed to Plant*, leading multiple close reads of the text to deepen knowledge and review vocabulary. She uses this text to start a unit-based Word Wall where students log unique vocabulary words associated with plants.

The next day, students participate in a shared reading of the narrative *The Garden* from *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel. They compare and contrast the information presented about planting seeds from this fictional text with yesterday's informational read aloud using a Venn diagram.

Accessing Instructional Level Texts with Guided Reading Groups

In a guided reading setting later that day, some students re-read *The Garden*. Ms. Jackson lists words from the story that contain common vowel digraphs, such as *seeds*, *grow*, and *shouting*, and asks the students to notice and practice the sounds of the vowels. When students begin reading, Ms. Jackson focuses on how they read vowel digraph words within the text, providing corrective feedback as needed. After reading, Ms. Jackson prompts students to think more about how Toad's feelings about his garden change throughout the story. Tomorrow in this guided reading group, Ms. Jackson will guide students to find specific quotes and actions that provide evidence of Toad's shifts in feelings.

In a different guided reading group, Ms. Jackson introduces the text *Oh Say Can You Seed? All About Flowering Plants* from the Cat in the Hat's Learning Library Series. Students begin by reading the text independently, and Ms. Jackson asks them to write vocabulary words they encounter that are unfamiliar. Over the course of the week, this guided reading group will engage in close readings of each section of the text, with a focus on building knowledge of plants through vocabulary study. Ms. Jackson will call their attention to additional vocabulary words and their meanings, including Tier II words such as *moist* (plants need moist soil) and *anchor* (roots anchor plants), as well as Tier III words, such as *fertilize* and *photosynthesis*. She will also help students make connections to the meanings of these words by reminding them of their experience visiting the school garden and inviting them to share other moments when they've encountered these terms in real-world settings. One student shares that her neighbor has asked her to help pull *weeds* along the sidewalk, while another jokes that his uncle always complains about the *pollen* in the air and how it makes him sneeze. Students add these new vocabulary terms to their Word Wall.

In addition to vocabulary study, Ms. Jackson will lead conversations around key conceptual ideas presented within the text *Oh Say Can You Seed?*, such as what it means for leaves to be a "food factory."

Extending Knowledge Development, Word Study, and Text Comprehension

Students plant seeds of their own, recalling information learned from texts to guide their process. For example, to sprout their seeds, they first place them on a wet piece of construction paper inside a glass jar, following the directions from the section "How to Raise Bean Plants" from the text *From Seed to Plant*. Every few days, students use tools to measure their seeds' growth, amount of sunlight and water, and changes in leaf development. They record their observations through speaking, drawing, and writing, and make predictions about what their seeds will look like in the following days based on the information they've gathered from texts. Later, once the seeds have sprouted, they'll transfer their plants to soil. Students will work in groups to write an informational piece on how to grow plants, using specific vocabulary from their unit, such as *soil*, *sprout*, *root*, and *stem*.

Ms. Jackson guides her students through a word study, vocabulary, and comprehension lesson based on the poem *Gathering Leaves* by Robert Frost. For vocabulary study, students discuss Frost's choice of some of the words and the mind pictures they create, such as how "bags full of leaves are light as balloons" and the meaning of the word "rustling." For word study, students read and analyze the vowel patterns that make up the rhyme scheme, including two different patterns that both produce the long A sound. Ms. Jackson points out how the words "duller" and "color" rhyme, even though the r-controlled vowels are different, and invites students to notice and identify other interesting phonics relationships. Once again, students think about how these words sound, how they contribute to the rhythm of the poem, and what they mean. Students engage in repeated readings of the poem throughout the week to build fluency and focus specifically on reading with appropriate expression based on the end punctuation of each line and the meanings that are conveyed with their expressions.

To extend comprehension and knowledge building, Ms. Jackson uses ideas from the *Gathering Leaves* poem to pose an inquiry question: why do leaves change color? Students discuss their independent hypotheses together, and then put their predictions in writing. Ms. Jackson invites students to collaboratively research their question, using the text *Why Do Leaves Change Color?* by Betsy Maestro as a keystone text. One differentiated small group reads the text independently, while another small group listens to a video recording of the text on the computer. After reading, both small groups discuss what they learned and return to their written predictions to edit and add more. Ms. Jackson works with another small group, reading the text aloud to them and asking questions along the way to assist their comprehension. In addition to the keystone text, Ms. Jackson shares other texts and forms of media that students explore during independent learning centers.

Later, Ms. Jackson takes the class outside to collect leaves. Students seek leaves of different colors from different kinds of trees. Back in their classroom, they discuss the physical characteristics of the leaves they found and make inferences about the temperature, levels of chlorophyll, and other factors that may have influenced the leaves' colors. Students each

choose one leaf and write an essay describing the leaf and its coloration, drawing information from the various texts they've read to support their inferences.

After reading several texts on plants, Ms. Jackson introduces a new idea—she asks students to think about examples of how plants and animals work together. Students think and write independently, then share their ideas with partners. Recalling from multiple sources, students list how bees transfer pollen from flower to flower, how burr-like seeds stick to animals' fur and are carried around, and how various animals drink nectar from flowers. Then, Ms. Jackson leads a shared reading lesson using *Green Invaders*, an article from National Geographic for Kids, which discusses the impact of invasive plant species on local ecosystems and food chains. Students identify additional relationships between plants and animals cited in the article, such as how monarch butterflies only eat milkweed.

While reading the *Green Invaders* article, students get excited about the following passage: *"The good news is, gardeners everywhere are working hard to protect native plants and get rid of the invaders. Many local garden centers sell native plants. 'Just Google 'native plants' and your location, and you can find out which plants really belong where you live,' says Tallamy."* Students beg Ms. Jackson to do the search, and together they browse images of local plants on the projector screen. The class decides to look for these plants when they're outside in their neighborhoods and to bring pictures or written descriptions back to the class. Ms. Jackson suggests that the class create their own encyclopedia of local plants, reminding students that they can use the vocabulary they've learned in their unit to label and describe the plants.

Writing and Speaking to Inform and Support Arguments

Students conclude their unit on plants by studying the impact of agriculture on communities, especially communities in different places from their own. During guided reading, they read *A Weed is a Flower: The Life of George Washington Carver* by Aliki. Ms. Jackson reads aloud *Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin, the story of a modern urban farmer whose goal is to provide affordable and healthy food to underserved communities. Ms. Jackson also reads aloud *Planting the Trees of Kenya* by Claire Nivola, about 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai. Finally, through read aloud and shared reading experiences, students read the fictional poem *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss.

Students synthesize their learning by writing and presenting two pieces: an informational piece about plants and their importance to the world and an opinion piece about which of the final texts they read poses the best argument for the value of plants and the need for conservation.

At the end of the unit, Ms. Jackson reviews student work and recalls conversations with students and their families about what they learned. She's confident that students developed a deep bank of knowledge and vocabulary about plants, and also improved their reading, speaking, and writing skill through the process.

Additional Standards Taught Through this Unit

Reading

- 2.RI.10 – By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2-3 complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Foundational Skills

- 2.RF.3 – Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words
- 2.RF.4 – Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension

Writing

- 2.W.1 – Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state and opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.
- 2.W.2 – Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.
- 2.W.7 – Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).
- 2.W.8 – Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

Speaking and Listening

- 2.SL.1 – Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- 2.SL.2 – Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Language

- 2.L.4 – Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 2 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.

Mathematics

- 2.MD.1 – Measure the length of an objective by selecting and using appropriate tools such as rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, and measuring tapes.

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