CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO LITERACY ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION

Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop.

—Lewis Carroll

OVERVIEW

For more than 10 years, I taught courses in reading assessment and instruction on two different college campuses. For several years, I directed a summer reading program where I worked with graduate and undergraduate students as they assessed and provided targeted instruction for 50 or more students annually. Children with whom we worked varied in age, cultural background, and socioeconomic status and came from different educational settings, but they had one thing in common: They all struggled with reading or writing. As we worked together, our collective goal was to help each child grow as a reader and writer. For us, nothing was more important.

As you move through the chapters in this text, you will meet 12 of the children with whom we worked. Each chapter, with the exception of the one you are reading now, focuses on one of six elements of reading described in the literature: emergent literacy, word identification, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and engagement. In the first section of each chapter, you will read a review of the literature to help build or extend your prior knowledge and inform your reading of the cases. The next two sections detail common assessments and instructional interventions related to the focus element to prepare you to better understand the cases and think about what you might do to help each child.

The case reports of struggling readers are presented next, and they form the heart of the chapter. Each case fully details the assessment of a child who

attended tutoring sessions or the summer reading program. Guiding questions and stopping points are provided to help you think about the learners' literacy strengths and needs as well as what you might do to help them become proficient readers and writers.

This first chapter is designed to set the stage for what you will explore in the remainder of the text. It presents general information about literacy processes as well as elements related to assessment and instruction. Finally, it provides important information about case-study methodology and outlines a framework for reading about and responding to the case reports.

Section I: Reading Process, Assessment, and Instruction

Why Learn to Read?

Consider the case of John Laurel:

John Laurel was a 16-year-old eighth grader reading at approximately the third grade level. At the age of 15, he was placed in a residential facility for boys after his family filed a petition in the courts citing that he had become ungovernable. He was ashamed that he read so poorly and actively avoided any situation that required him to read aloud. During a social studies class, his teacher asked him to read from the course text. He began, but his pace was so slow and his reading so labored that his peers heckled him. John stood up and shouted at the teacher, "I told you I can't read this!" threw the book, and walked out.

John was one of our students. His difficulties in learning to read and write were long-standing, and at age 16, he faced a bleak future. He had already learned that reading was a basic requirement for success in academic subjects, and his failure to read had exacerbated other problems, emotional and psychological, so much so that they severely limited his ability to complete high school. He had yet to learn that his reading disability would likely decrease his ability for gainful, steady employment (Morris, 2008); result in his living at the poverty level; and increase the chance that he would be imprisoned at least once over the course of his life (WriteExpress Corporation, 2009).

As noted by Richek, Caldwell, Jennings, and Lerner (2002), "society suffers when citizens cannot read adequately. People with low reading levels comprise many of the unemployed, high school dropouts, the poor and those convicted of crimes" (p. 3). Being able to read is no less than a survival skill in today's world. Given this, working with children like John to help them acquire the skills and strategies that effective readers employ takes on huge importance.

What Do We Do When We Read?

Children are not born reading. There is no genetic predisposition toward reading; everyone must be taught (Wolfe, 2007). As depicted in Figure 1.1, reading is a complex, interactive, developmental process that requires readers to use print-processing skills, prior knowledge and experiences, and a variety of comprehension strategies to make meaning of texts (Barr, Blachowicz, Bates, Katz, & Kaufman, 2007; Braunger & Lewis, 2001; Morris, 2008).

Definitions of reading routinely list the following elements as essential in learning to read proficiently: phonemic awareness, decoding skill, word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, comprehension, and **metacognition** (Manzo, Manzo, & Albee, 2004; National Assessment Governing Board, 2008;

Figure 1.1   The Reading Process
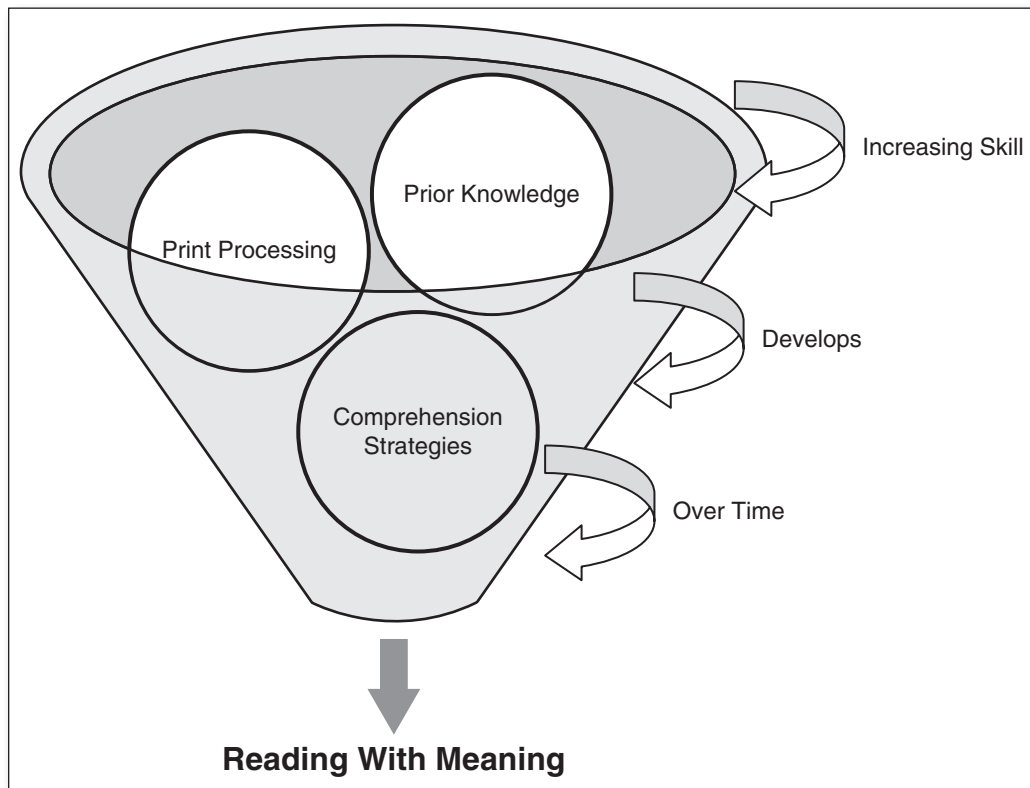
National Reading Panel, 2000). Many children learn each of these elements with little difficulty and negotiate the reading process smoothly. As mature and proficient readers, they engage the following behaviors:

- They begin by forming an overview of text and then search for information to which they must pay particular attention.
- They progress through text with different levels of interaction, including interpreting and evaluating what they read.
- Based on previous reading experiences and prior knowledge, they form hypotheses about what the text will communicate and revise their initial ideas and their knowledge base as their reading continues.
- As they read, they continuously acquire new understandings and integrate these into their ongoing process of building comprehension.
- They monitor their understanding of text, recognize when text is not making sense, and employ a range of strategies to enhance their comprehension.
- They evaluate the qualities of the text.
- They use the ideas and information they acquire from text to expand their thinking about a topic, perform a specific task, draw conclusions, or make generalizations about what they have read (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008, p. 20).

About 25% of students will experience some difficulty learning to read (Morris, 2008). These children, and those described in the case reports within each chapter, need the help of knowledgeable teachers and specialists to build the skill and confidence necessary to become thoughtful, proficient readers.

What Factors Influence Literacy Development?

The development of a child's ability to read effectively and take pleasure in the act of reading is influenced by multiple factors. Manzo et al. (2004) noted three broad factors: environmental (language and sociocultural differences such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and dialect), psychological (cognitive, attitudinal, and emotional functioning), and physiological (vision, hearing, and neurological functioning). Lipson and Wixson (2003) provided detailed information related to Manzo et al.'s (2004) broad categories in a discussion of factors that influence reading performance. These factors, summarized in Table 1.1, include elements essential for skilled reading, factors related to the learning context, factors related to the learner, and factors that are closely associated with literacy performance (correlates).

Table 1.1 Factors That Influence Reading Performance

Factors Related to the Elements of Skilled Reading	
Comprehension	• Ability to read for understanding: integrate prior knowledge; draw inferences; predict; establish purpose for reading; identify important information; and monitor and "fix up" comprehension • Ability to read to remember and learn: preview a text; make plans for reading; locate specific information; and identify the organization of the information in the text (text structures)
Vocabulary development	• Knowledge of word meanings • Ability to infer meanings of words • Ability to learn meanings of new words
Word identification and spelling	• Ability to recognize words on sight • Ability to decode unfamiliar words rapidly through **contextual analysis, morphemic analysis,** or **phonic analysis**
Fluency	• Ability to read accurately at an appropriate rate with proper expression
Contextual Factors	
Settings	• Community and culture of the learner • Classroom setting: sets of rules and routines; testing situations; ability grouping; patterns of social interaction
Instructional practices	• Instructional activities and routines • Assessment practices
Instructional resources	• Commercial reading programs • Materials: trade books; basal readers; subject area textbooks; reference materials; student writing, etc. • Use of technology
Learner Factors	
Prior knowledge and experiences	• Limited or incorrect information has a negative effect on comprehension. • Experiences that are not well-matched to school-based literacy expectations can be problematic.
Knowledge about reading and writing	• Metacognition: knowledge about and control over one's own learning, including knowing what strategy or procedure is needed at a particular time to maintain comprehension • **Phonological awareness:** ability to divide sentences into words and words into syllables and to identify common phonemes (smallest units of sound)

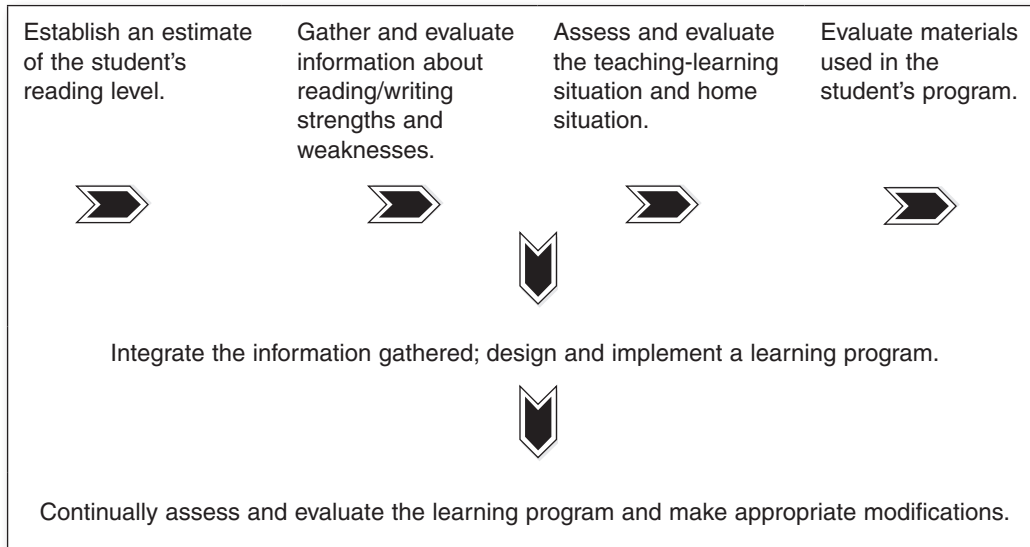| Attitude and motivation	• Positive attitudes and motivation toward reading can scaffold weak performance, while negative attitudes can prevent the application of strategies or the learning of new strategies.
Correlates of Reading Performance	
Social and emotional development	• Emotional problems or social difficulties have negative effects on learning.
Language development	• Delayed, underdeveloped, or different language skills, including those of English language learners, pose problems.
Physical development:	• Hearing loss • Vision problems
Cognitive development	• Perception: the ability to organize incoming sensory information • Attention: the ability to attend to school tasks, especially those that are print related • Memory: the ability to store and retrieve information effectively and efficiently

As you read and discuss the assessment details of each case in the chapters ahead, you may wish to revisit the table to guide your thinking and your decision-making process.

What Are the Elements of Effective Literacy Assessment?

Effective literacy assessment should address all of the factors summarized in Table 1.1. In addition, effective assessment of struggling learners should explore how students approach reading tasks and texts that are part of their grade-level instruction (Manzo et al., 2004). The student who is able to negotiate instructional-level materials successfully and willingly reads classroom materials and recreational texts is not considered to have a reading problem.

Kibby (as cited in Gunning, 2006, p. 67) identified the six essential steps (see Figure 1.2) in the assessment process that incorporate the factors outlined by Lipson and Wixson (2003).

The assessments used with the learners reported in the cases in this book were selected to reveal a solid understanding of the students' reading skills, strategies, and abilities. In addition, examiners gathered information related to the students' home and community, the classroom environment, their attitudes about reading and writing, and their levels of motivation and engagement.

Figure 1.2   Steps in the Assessment Process

Establish an estimate of the student's reading level.

Gather and evaluate information about reading/writing strengths and weaknesses.

Assess and evaluate the teaching-learning situation and home situation.

Evaluate materials used in the student's program.

Integrate the information gathered; design and implement a learning program.

Continually assess and evaluate the learning program and make appropriate modifications.

More detailed descriptions of each of the assessment methods and tools can be found in the chapters that follow; however, a brief description of the key assessments that were used repeatedly is provided here:

- *Analytical Reading Inventory* (Woods & Moe, 1999). This is one of several informal reading inventories available today. It contains a series of graded word lists. Students' responses to the word lists guide the teacher in determining which narrative and expository passages to use for further assessment. For each passage selected, the student is asked to make a prediction based on the title and first two sentences, read the passage aloud, retell as much as she or he can remember, and answer several comprehension questions. The inventory is used to help examiners determine students' **independent,** instructional, and **frustration reading levels** and to identify strengths and weaknesses in word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Additional information about the Analytical Reading Inventory can be found in *Analytical Reading Inventory: Comprehensive Standards-Based Assessment for All Students Including Gifted and Remedial* (Woods & Moe, 2006).

- *Developmental Reading Assessment Kit* (Beaver, 2006). The DRA is an assessment kit similar to the informal reading inventory; however, word

lists are not used. Guidelines are provided for the selection of DRA texts with the caveat that the texts selected should allow students to attend more to comprehension than decoding. Two kits are available, one for use with students in Grades K through 3 and one for Grades 4 through 8. The assessments help examiners identify students' strengths and weaknesses in areas of reading accuracy, fluency, comprehension, and engagement. In addition, guidance in planning for instruction is provided. Additional information about the DRA is available from Pearson Education Inc. at www.pearson school.com.

- *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002). The survey consists of a series of six tasks that reveal young children's understandings, skills, and strategies in the following areas: concepts about print (see Chapter 2 for more information), oral reading accuracy (through running records; see Chapter 2), letter identification, isolated word reading, writing vocabulary, and letter-sound knowledge. Information about this survey can be found at the Reading Recovery Council website at www.readingr ecovery.org.

- *Sight Word List.* The sight word list used for a majority of the cases was drawn from a graded list supplied by the Summer Reading Program and included the Dolch (1936) 220 sight words. Assessment forms for assessing sight word knowledge are readily available in online formats.

- *Burke Reading Interview* (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987). This is a 10-question interview that explores the reader's perceptions about reading. Questions include the following: When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do? Do you ever do anything else? Who is a good reader you know?

The complete set of interview questions, along with students' responses, is included in the individual cases in the chapters ahead.

- *Interest Surveys/Inventories.* The cases include the variety of questionnaires examiners used to gather information about the students' interests, including the sorts of activities they engaged in outside of school, their out-of-school literacy-related habits, their reading preferences, and their learning goals.

- *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (McKenna & Kear, 1990). This popular survey is also known as the *Garfield Reading Attitude Survey* because

it uses the cartoon character Garfield the Cat in response items. Children are asked to respond to 20 items related to their attitudes toward reading. They select from among four Garfield stances, from happy to upset. The tool has been validated, and percentile ranks are available at grade levels one through six so that comparisons can be made. This survey can be found at the Professor Garfield website, http://www.professorgarfield.org/parents_teachers/printables/reading.html.

• *Writing Attitude Survey* (Kear, Coffman, McKenna, & Ambrosio, 2000). This survey also uses Garfield the Cat in response items. Children are asked to respond to 28 items related to their attitudes toward writing. They select from among four Garfield stances, from happy to upset. The tool has been validated, and percentile ranks are available at grade levels one through nine so that comparisons can be made. This survey can be found at the Professor Garfield website, http://www.professorgarfield.org/parents_teachers/printables/reading.html.

Meaningful and timely assessment will drive individualized instruction for each student.

What Are the Elements of Effective Literacy Instruction?

Effective literacy instruction derives from effective assessment. Once teachers have a good understanding of the strengths and needs of the individual learner, appropriate interventions to address those needs can be designed. Each subsequent chapter in this text focuses on one of six elements of reading and details a select number of instructional interventions that are effective. In this introductory chapter, I include several general principles of effective interventions. They are an amalgam drawn from textbooks that focus on the assessment and instruction of struggling readers and writers. As you read and discuss the details of each case in the chapters ahead, you may wish to revisit the principles to guide your thinking about the interventions you might employ. Key principles repeated in the literature include the following:

- Identify children who are having difficulty early and provide intensive, focused instruction.
- Tailor instruction to the specific needs of each learner within small group and individualized settings.
- Teach and model the strategies that effective readers and writers use.
- Provide multiple opportunities for independent reading of a wide variety of extended texts.
- Use high-quality literature that children can read with support and that is within their range of interests.
- Monitor student learning through continuous assessment.
- Build a sense of community, where children feel accepted, where taking risks and making mistakes is expected, and where children learn to believe in the power of their own efforts (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009; Gunning, 2006; McCormick, 2003; Richek et al., 2002).

One schoolwide approach that adheres to the principles listed previously is **Response to Intervention** (RTI). The International Reading Association described RTI as a "framework to help schools identify and support students before the difficulties they encounter with language and literacy become more difficult" (International Reading Association, 2010, p. 2). The RTI process involves ongoing assessment and increasingly differentiated and intensified instruction to meet learners' needs. Broad levels of differentiation have been described as *tiers* (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009; Feifer & Toffalo, 2007; Wright, 2007). Tier 1 involves the delivery of a high-quality curriculum or core program along with careful monitoring of the progress

of all learners. Tier 2 engages those learners who need additional instructional time and support to meet learning expectations. Tailored interventions are provided, usually in the classroom setting—in small groups and occasionally one-on-one. Tier 3 provides intensive, individualized assessment and instruction for those learners who are still not achieving after Tier 2 interventions have been implemented. The goal of RTI is to quickly identify and provide appropriate instruction for each student as soon as she demonstrates the need for assistance (Wright, 2007). See Figure 1.3 for a graphic representation of this approach.

The students you will meet in the cases described in this book have generally been less successful in Tier 1 settings. Classroom teachers who believed additional and more targeted instruction was needed referred most of the children

Figure 1.3   Response to Intervention
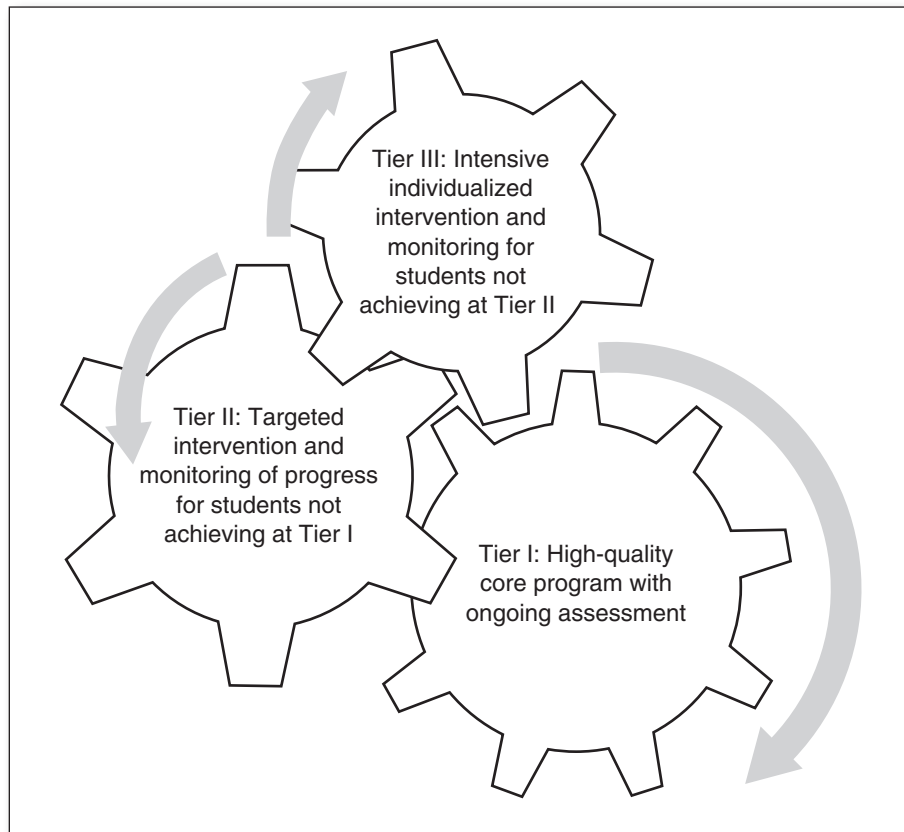
to our programs. Our goal was to assess the children using multiple tools and techniques so that we could provide highly differentiated instruction that would help them become more effective readers and writers.

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SECTION II: CASE-BASED INSTRUCTION

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Why Use Case-Based Instruction?

Beginning teachers, as well as those who wish to become literacy specialists, should be able to use a wide range of assessment tools and practices to support students in the complex activity that is reading (International Reading Association, 2004). In addition, teachers should be able to interpret the information collected from those varied assessments with a critical eye and make instructional decisions that support typically progressing readers as well as those who struggle (Strickland & Snow, 2002; International Reading Association, 2007). Coursework that uses case method instruction provides an opportunity for students to learn to think like a teacher. It provides an important vicarious experience through the reading and discussion of cases (Jay, 2004).

According to Manzo et al. (2004), our minds function primarily by analogy—that is, when we encounter something new, we tend to ask what or who we know that is similar. A case has the capacity to engage us in experiences that mirror real-life situations, and therefore, it offers more authentic preparation for teaching than more traditional means of instruction (Griffith & La Framboise, 1998). If we have a mental collection of cases that we have studied and discussed, when we encounter readers who struggle, our work becomes easier. Case-based instruction prepares us to respond with more knowledge and confidence when we are faced with assessing and teaching real children. We can say, "This is just like John's case; I know what I will try first."

Another important advantage of case-based instruction is its ability to engage students in the processes of analysis, critical thinking, and reflection (Merseth, 1991; Neuharth-Pritchett, Payne, & Reiff, 2004). Well-written cases can represent the messy and the complex—where neither problems nor solutions are immediately clear (Grossman, 1992). They require us to go below the surface of a situation and grapple with the multiple and nuanced issues involved in order to figure out what might be happening and what might be done (Silverman, Welty, & Lyon, 1996).

There are different types of cases, depending on the professional field in which the approach is used. The cases in this text are decision-making cases that focus on struggling readers. They are designed to guide your thinking

about each child as a reader and writer, to help you become familiar with a number of assessment tools, and to hone your analysis and decision-making skills. The ultimate goal is for you to make assessment and instruction decisions that will make a difference in the lives of children for whom learning to read and write is neither easy nor enjoyable.

The 12 cases presented in this text have been placed within particular chapters because the readers' issues are strongly connected to the element that is the focus of the chapter. However, take care not to compartmentalize your thinking. You will find, as you read along, that the students often have difficulties across reading elements and that cases from one chapter can easily become part of the discussion in another chapter.

How Will You Use the Cases in This Text?

Active learning is a hallmark of case-method instruction, and it demands interaction among students in small and whole group settings (Junselman & Johnson, 2004; Neuharth-Pritchett et al., 2004). You will be challenged to apply your knowledge, air and examine alternate points of view, and reflect on your beliefs and values (Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993; Snyder & McWilliams, 2003). You will notice that each case has a number of stop signs that act as visual cues designed to slow you down so that you can analyze small chunks of information. Each time you come to a stop sign, you should revisit the guiding questions provided at the beginning of the section:

1. *What important facts have been revealed at this point in the case?*

2. *Based on what you know so far, what do you think might be going on? It may help to respond to the following prompt: Could it be that . . . ?*

3. *What are the learner's strengths and needs?*

4. *What further assessments or interventions might you try to confirm your ideas?*

These questions are based on the work of Omalza, Aihara, and Stephens (1997), who developed a process of hypothesis testing they labeled *HT.* It is a four-step recursive process that consists of observations, interpretations, hypothesis formation, and curricular decisions. Addressing these questions mirrors the HT process and will help you build a response that will guide and enrich your discussion of the case.

Silverman et al. (1996) offered detailed suggestions that I draw on here to help you understand and discuss the cases in this text. In preparing for the discussion of the case, follow these steps:

1. Read the case quickly to get the gist of what it is about and to identify the issues.

2. Reread the case more carefully, stopping at the stop signs to address the four guiding questions. (Be sure to incorporate information learned in the beginning sections and to revisit core textbook chapters or other course readings to help integrate the content of the text with the needs of the learner.)

3. Read the case a third time and revisit the questions, adding or revising information that you may have missed.

4. Make a list of additional questions you have about the case. What further information is needed that can be explored in the discussion?

Thoughtful reading and a well-prepared written response to a case can be very beneficial, but the importance of sustained group discussion is equally important. Such discussion will move you to deeper understandings about literacy assessment and instruction and your role in developing the reading and writing abilities of children at all levels. The instructor's role will be to facilitate the discussion, not to engage in it; therefore, your active involvement is critical. You must participate fully. At times, this means not only talking about your understandings, but also actively listening to the ideas of your discussion group. Shulman and Mesa-Bains (1994) suggested the following four ground rules for discussion:

1. Respect each member's contribution and point of view.

2. Do not interrupt! Wait for speakers to finish their statements before responding.

3. Do not let anyone monopolize the discussion.

4. Provide equal opportunity for all members to contribute. (p. 7)

Finally, it is important to remember that the goal of the discussion is not to arrive at *the* answer for each case, but rather to explore what might be happening and how you might intervene to help the learner. When you are well prepared and take your responsibility to participate seriously, the case discussions will be lively and thoroughly enjoyable learning opportunities.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This introductory chapter provided a discussion of several concepts that will form the foundation for your exploration of the chapters ahead. First, learning to read is of paramount importance. John, and so many other readers like him, will struggle continuously unless he is helped to make real gains in his reading and writing skills. His ability to read and write is inextricably tied to his success in life. Second, the act of reading is highly complex. It is an interactive, developmental process that demands the engagement of students' minds and hearts. Third, success in reading is influenced by several factors (environmental, physiological, and psychological) that must be considered when assessing students who struggle so that appropriate interventions can be employed. Fourth, appropriate instructional interventions are those that focus on student needs while building on their strengths and encouraging their love of reading. Finally, this text incorporates a case study approach to learning that will allow you to work vicariously with children who vary in age, gender, and cultural background. As you explore their stories, you will deepen your knowledge about the assessment and instruction of struggling readers.

Terms highlighted in this chapter

metacognition 4	contextual analysis 6
morphemic analysis 6	phonic analysis 6
phonological awareness 6	independent reading level 8
frustration reading level 8	Response to Intervention (RTI) 11

FINAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND RESPONSE

1. As you consider the short case of John, think about the children or adults you know who struggle with reading or writing. How has this struggle affected their school, work, or social lives?

2. Reflect on yourself as a reader. How did you learn to read? What do you believe you do well as a reader? When you read difficult texts, what do you do when you lose meaning? How might this self-knowledge affect how you respond to those you will teach?

3. Consider the elements of effective literacy assessment and instruction described in this chapter, along with those you have read about or experienced. How might you design and organize your classroom to identify and help those readers who are having difficulty?

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