

Comprehending Reading Standards

By Dr. Bruce H. Crowder

Reading standards landed on the education stage nearly a decade ago with the advent of Common Core ELA and Literacy Standards. While not entirely embraced by many states, the standards did play an integral part in heightening the importance of reading across the nation and in all disciplines. Teachers were drawn to them mostly from the role they played in federal and state testing requirements. The move to establish reading standards seemed pushed and employed in what appeared to be a hurtful manner before schools were ready. What role were they really designed to play?

First of all, they were dubbed COMMON to affect all schools across the nation. Next, they operated from the premise that ALL TEACHERS ARE TEACHERS OF READING. Finally, they were further designed to influence CONTENT READING. Beyond the primary years of language acquisition, the aim of reading is the acquisition of KNOWLEDGE. In this manner reading skills are reinforced as they are needed with the support of strategies to enhance reasoning with text for deeper understanding.

Reading standards for literature and informational texts introduced or made significant literary terms such as theme, main and central idea, author's purpose and meaning, and tone. More than this, the standards were built within three clusters: Key Ideas and Details; Craft and Structure; and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. In this manner, the standards spiral in much the same way curriculum does from foundational operations to a higher order. In their design they resemble Bloom's *Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain* and Norman Webb's *Depth of Knowledge (DOK)* in categorizing the complexity of thought.

The initial three anchor standards inform the importance of knowing what the text says explicitly with its focus on ideas and details that are foundational in recognizing theme and the effect on characters and events. They represent the **literal level** of reading comprehension. In spiraling to the next cluster of standards, the focus is on the meaning of the text with an emphasis on words, phrases, and figurative language in determining the structure of texts, and speaker's point of view. The final set of standards focus on deeper understanding of text through analysis of visual and multimedia elements in contributing to meaning, tone, or beauty of a text, as well as knowing how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text. Standards in this cluster are relegated to the **interpretive level** of reading comprehension.

Anchor Standard 9, while residing in the final cluster, takes reading comprehension to the **applied level** of comprehension for both literature and informational text. The focus is on comparing text in the same genre, as well as analyzing how modern works draw on themes, patterns of events, and character types. There is an emphasis on analysis and comparison of texts. As a whole, the standards are content-based and are to be employed in the act of reading.

References

Common Core State Standards. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washing D.C. 2010.

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