

# Article at a Glance

Pinnell, Gay Su and Fountas, Irene C. (2014). *The Critical Role of Text Complexity in Teaching Children to Read* [White Paper]. Retrieved December 21, 2016, from <http://www.fountasandpinnell.com/resource/library/id/280>

## Purpose of the Article:

It is widely accepted to provide reading texts to students at their independent reading level. More research is showing that to increase students' reading ability; students need a gradient of text complexities. With the right supports in place for teachers to execute lessons, it is possible for students to learn and interact with these complex texts. High literacy achievement comes from the richest learning opportunities available combined with highly effective instruction.

## Background Information:

- Learning to read requires student engagement with a variety of texts and genres.
- Developing students' desire to read voluntarily requires teachers to provide engaging instruction surrounding various types and complexity of texts.
- Students' background knowledge is vital in comprehension of all types of texts. This is because when a student already knows something about a topic or can make a connection, they spend less time synthesizing the new information.
- The Common Core Standards expect students of all abilities to think deeply, analyze, critique, and discuss texts with others.
- Both whole-group and small-group settings help meet the unique and varied levels of students in a classroom.
- Differentiated-instruction includes providing students a variety of text levels, text in multiple formats (auditory and visual), visual manipulatives, whole-group and small-group lessons, and activities with scaffolded options for completion.

## Key Findings:

All students can think, talk, and write about texts that are *beyond* their current abilities. Students should have numerous opportunities to engage with these complex texts with the support of a teacher. The reason it is important to provide complex texts is that it increases students' literacy achievement. Teachers should push the boundaries of students' learning by offering complex texts beyond their abilities, but with scaffolded supports in place. This is effective because supports can decrease over time, landing the student with more knowledge than they had if they remained with texts at their current level.

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- With the adoption of the Common Core Standards, there is a shift in attention towards texts with more complexity.
- Using texts at students' independent reading level is common in many classrooms. However, rich texts and complexities provide higher literacy achievements for students.
- Teachers need to carefully select complex texts and ensure they have the necessary supports in place (like vocabulary instruction) so students can access the meaning of the text.
- It is okay if the material is too hard to decode, as long as there are other access methods used during instruction. Access methods include digital recordings or a teacher read-aloud. There is tremendous value for students to hear materials read aloud as well as the modeling of critical thinking aloud done while reading.
- If adequate supports for students are integrated, students' reading abilities will rise.
- **Every day** students need to engage with a gradient of text complexity to further their learning.
- It is critical to creating multiple opportunities for students to make connections and tie information to their background knowledge.
- Learning and thinking critically, as well as deeply, only happens when students are taught with materials beyond their boundaries because it leads them to do more than they could do independently.
- Small-group instruction has many benefits in providing complex texts to students.
- High literacy development comes from rich exposure and learning opportunities, but these things are dependent on teachers having the right supports to deliver the instruction.

## Application of Key Findings to Boardmaker Instructional Solutions:

### All Boardmaker Instructional Solutions incorporates the following:

- An opportunity for students with moderate to severe disabilities to interact and learn from text that is more complex than typically delivered to this population. Although the content is rich in vocabulary and complexity, it is still conducive to reading at an early elementary level.
- A systematic vocabulary strategy which ensures students are learning the meaning of words before encountering them in the text. This multi-step strategy asks students to construct a personal understanding of Tier 2 words. These words contribute to the

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comprehension of the text and support the student in writing and communicating effectively.

- Use of an anchor-read-apply strategy which allows students to integrate background knowledge and then connect new learning to what they already know.
- The text is available in text-to-speech format, and the activities are fully interactive and accessible, including every student from a language and cognitive standpoint yet also presume competence.
- The instructional approach delivers information in chunks and then encourages students to revisit this information across a range of learning experiences (reading, writing, communicating, listening, reflecting, etc.)
- Teachers are provided supports for every lesson, so students of all cognitive abilities can comprehend and further their learning boundaries.
- Meets the demands of the Common Core State Standards.
- Lessons are bundled each day in ways that account for diverse interest and ability and also acknowledge attentional limits.
- Lessons designed for a whole-group, small-group, or one on one sessions. There is flexibility for the teacher to choose how to deliver instruction.
- The instructional approach delivers information in chunks and then encourages students to revisit this information across a range of learning experiences (reading, writing, communicating, listening, reflecting, etc.)