

Chapter 1: The Reading Act

The reading act is composed of two major parts: the reading process and the reading product. The reading process has nine aspects—sensory, perceptual, sequential, experiential, thinking, learning, association, affective, and constructive—that combine to produce the reading product, communication.

Three of the many types of theories about the reading process are subskill theories, interactive theories, and transactive theories. Subskill theories depict reading as a series of subskills that children must master so that they become automatic and smoothly integrated. Interactive theories depict reading as the interaction of two types of processing: top-down and bottom-up. Both types of processing are used to recognize and comprehend words. According to the bottom-up view, reading is initiated by the printed symbols (letters and words) and proceeds to larger linguistic units until the reader discovers meaning. According to the top-down view, reading begins with the reader's generation of hypotheses or predictions about the material, with the reader using the visual cues in the material to test these hypotheses as necessary. Therefore, according to interactive theories, both the print and the reader's background are important in the reading process. Transactive theories depict every reading act as a transaction involving a reader and a text at a particular time in a specific context. Readers generate and test hypotheses about the reading material and get feedback from the material. Whole language activities fit well with the transactive theoretical stance, since the whole language philosophy embraces the idea of encouraging authentic transactions with text.

Whole language philosophy also encourages collaborative, learner-centered classroom environments, much reading and writing of whole selections, and student choice.

Some principles related to reading instruction that may be helpful to teachers include the following:

1. Reading is a complex act with many factors that must be considered.
2. Reading involves the construction of the meaning represented by the printed symbols.
3. There is no one correct way to teach reading.
4. Learning to read is a continuing process.
5. Students should be taught word recognition skills that will allow them to unlock the pronunciations and meanings of unfamiliar words independently.
6. The teacher should assess each student's reading ability and use the assessment as a basis for planning instruction.
7. Reading and the other language arts are closely interrelated.
8. Using complete literature selections in the reading program is important.
9. Reading is an integral part of all content area instruction within the educational program.
10. The student needs to see that reading can be an enjoyable pursuit.
11. Reading should be taught in a way that allows each child to experience success.
12. Encouragement of self-direction and self-monitoring of reading is important.