

Chapter 3

Contexts for Learning to Read



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This chapter establishes the foundation for the information that will be collected via the PIRLS background questionnaires given to the students themselves as well as to their parents, teachers, and schools. Participating countries also provide important information about the national contexts and curriculum for instruction in language and reading. PIRLS makes every attempt to collect important contextual information about procedures and practices that have been shown to be effective in increasing achievement in reading. In this way, countries can better evaluate their PIRLS results in terms of the prevalence of the situation or practice in their country and its relationship with student achievement in reading.

Young children acquire reading literacy through a variety of activities and experiences within different contexts. During their primary school years, children develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes associated with reading literacy mainly at home and in school. Various resources and activities have fostered their reading literacy, including those that occur as a natural and informal part of daily activities. Less structured activities can be as critical in helping young children develop reading literacy as the more structured activities that occur in classrooms as part of reading instruction. Moreover, each environment supports the other, and the connection between home and school is an important element in learning.

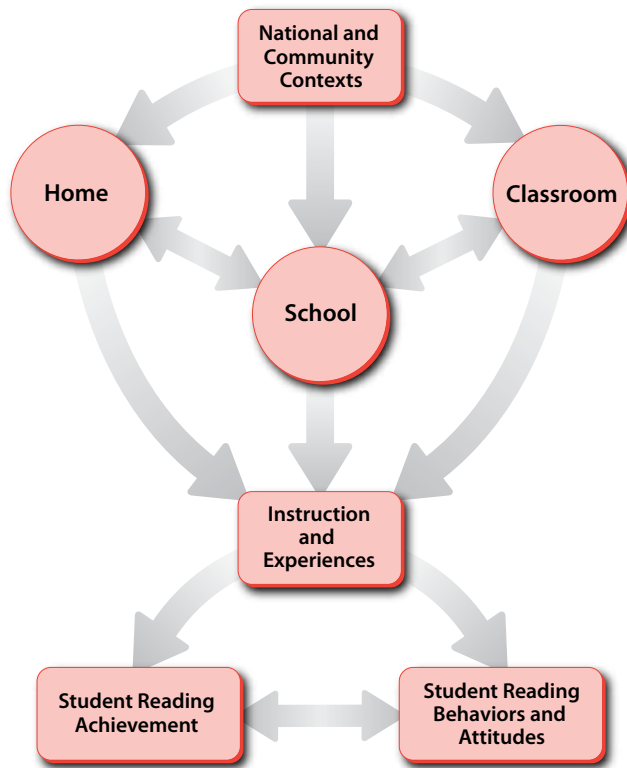
Beyond the direct home and school influences on children's reading are the broader environments in which children live and learn. Children's schools and homes are situated in communities with different resources, goals, and organizational features. These aspects of the community will

likely influence home environments and schools and thus children's reading literacy. Even broader, yet as important, is the national context in which children live and go to school. The level of resources generally available in a country; government decisions about the priorities given to education; and the curricular goals, programs, and policies related to reading education will undoubtedly influence the school and home contexts for learning to read. Because the factors that may foster success in learning or those that may impede learning are distributed across community, home, and school environments, PIRLS has adopted a framework that takes the nesting of these situations into account.

Figure 2 shows the relationships among the home, school, and classroom influences on children's reading development and how this interaction is shaped by the community and country context. The figure illustrates how student outcomes, such as reading achievement and behaviors and attitudes, are a product of instruction and experiences gained in a variety of contexts. Also, it is noted that achievement and attitudes can reinforce one another. Better readers may enjoy and value reading more than poorer readers, thus reading more and further improving their skills.

To better understand the different components of children's literacy development, PIRLS utilizes background information from a variety of sources. To provide information about the national contexts in which children's homes and schools are situated, PIRLS publishes the PIRLS Encyclopedia as part of each assessment (for PIRLS 2001, Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Flaherty, 2002; for PIRLS 2006, Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007). As in previous cycles, the *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* will be a collection of chapters from participating countries describing their policies and practices for reading education. The *PIRLS 2011 Encyclopedia* will also include an introduction that focuses on the national contexts for the support and implementation of reading curricula and policies

Figure 2 Contexts for Developing Children’s Reading Literacy



across countries based on responses to a curriculum questionnaire. To gather information about the home, school, and classroom factors associated with the development of reading literacy, PIRLS 2011 will collect responses to background questionnaires completed by the students tested, their parents or caregivers, their school principals, and their teachers.

National and Community Contexts

Cultural, social, political, and economic factors all contribute to the backdrop of children’s literacy development within a country and community. The success a country has in educating its children and producing a literate population depends greatly on the country’s emphasis on the goal of literacy for all, the resources it has available,

and the mechanisms it can establish for providing effective programs and incentives that foster reading and improve achievement.

Languages and Emphasis on Literacy

The historical background of language and literacy in a country can influence the challenges and instructional practices in teaching children to read. For example, some countries have one commonly spoken language, but other countries have historical roots in two or more languages and, additionally, widespread immigration can result in a multilingual culture. Thus, decisions about the language(s) of instruction and how to implement those decisions can be very complicated.

Also, the value that a country places on literacy and literacy activities affects the commitment of time and resources necessary for a literature-rich environment. A country's decision to make literacy a priority is influenced in part by people's backgrounds and beliefs about the importance of literacy for success both within and outside of school (Street, 2001). Even without extensive economic resources, countries can promote literacy through national and local policies on reading education. Outside of school, parents and others within the community can foster an environment that values reading by inviting and sharing experiences with text (Tse & Loh, 2007).

Demographics and Resources

The characteristics of a country's population and the national economy can have a tremendous impact on the relative ease or difficulty of producing high rates of literacy among its people and on the availability and extent of the resources required. The sheer size of a country geographically can create difficulties in delivering a uniformly rigorous curriculum, as can a very large population. Having greater economic resources allows for better educational facilities and greater numbers of well-trained teachers

and administrators. It also provides the opportunity to invest in literacy through widespread community programs and by making print materials and technology more readily available in community or school libraries, classrooms, and in homes (Neuman, 1999).

Countries with a large and diverse population and few material and human resources generally face greater challenges than those with more favorable circumstances (Bos, Schwippert, & Stubbe, 2007; Gradstein & Schiff, 2006; Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007; Taylor & Vinjevoold, 2000; Trong, 2009). Nationally and locally, the diversity of languages used, levels of adult literacy, and other social and health demographics can influence the difficulty of the educational task. Changing populations due to migration within and across country borders also may affect priorities among literacy-related issues in education policy and require additional resources.

Organization and Structure of the Education System

How educational policies are established and implemented can have a tremendous impact upon how schools operate. Some countries have highly centralized systems of education in which most policy-related decisions are made at the national or regional level and there is a great deal of uniformity in education in terms of curriculum, textbooks, and general policies. In comparison, there also are countries that have much more decentralized systems in which many important decisions are made at the local and school levels, resulting in greater variation in school operations and classroom instruction.

The way students proceed through school (also referred to as “student flow”) is a feature of education systems that varies across countries (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007). Particularly relevant for a study of fourth-grade reading achievement are the age of entry to formal schooling and the age when formal reading instruction begins. Students in countries that begin formal schooling at a younger age do not necessarily begin to receive formal reading

instruction in their first year, due to the cognitive demands of reading. In addition, for a study of children at this level, the type of school that students generally attend during the early years and whether students will eventually move into a tracked or comprehensive program of study are of interest, as are promotion and retention policies. The presence of an examination system with consequences for program placement or grade promotion can have a significant influence on children's progress in learning to read.

Even before they begin formal primary school, children may receive considerable exposure to literacy materials and activities as part of their preprimary educational experience. As described in the *PIRLS 2006 Encyclopedia* (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007), countries vary dramatically in their policies and practices with regard to early (preprimary) education, ranging from no specific requirements to compulsory kindergarten in a formal school setting. In addition, and partly as a result of this variability, PIRLS has found that students entering primary school differ considerably both within and among countries in the amount of preprimary education they have received, from none at all to three years or more. Furthermore, on average across countries, there is a positive relationship between years of preprimary education and reading achievement in the fourth grade (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007).

The Reading Curriculum in the Primary Grades

Curricular policies are shaped in many different ways. At the highest level, they may be established in some detail by government and jurisdictional requirements and then further affected by regional and local school personnel and characteristics, even in countries with considerable centralized decision making. Policies may range from those governing the grade in which formal reading instruction begins to those that prescribe the types of material and the methods to be used in teaching reading.

Curricular aspects and governing policies particularly relevant to the acquisition of reading literacy include standards or benchmarks established for reading development, prevalence of school and classroom libraries, instructional time, methods and materials, and ways of identifying students in need of remediation. Considerable research evidence, including results from IEA studies (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007), indicates that students' academic achievement is closely related to the rigor of the curriculum. This involves a coherent progression of instruction and materials through the grade levels, including emphasis on decoding and comprehension strategies, and access to a variety of reading materials. Effective methods for disseminating the curriculum to teachers, parents, and the general public are important, as are ways for making sure that revisions and updates are integrated into instruction.

Delivering a coherent and rigorous curriculum is dependent on well-qualified teachers. Research has established the importance of teachers being prepared in the subject matter they teach and of their certification status (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). The requirements to become a primary teacher may include certain types of academic preparation, passing an examination, or meeting other certification criteria. Some countries also have induction or mentoring programs for entering teachers and a number of opportunities for ongoing professional development to keep teachers apprised of current developments.

Home Contexts

Much research has provided insight into the importance of home environments for children's reading literacy. Long before children develop the cognitive and linguistic skills necessary for reading, early experiences with printed and oral language establish a foundation for learning (Adams, 1990; Ehri, 1995; Verhoeven, 2002). Particular

home characteristics can create a climate that encourages children to explore and experiment with language and various forms of texts. Parents and other family members impart their own beliefs about reading that shape the way that children are exposed to and experience text (Baker, Afflerbach, & Reinking, 1996; Cramer & Castle, 1994). The following discussion highlights some of the major aspects of the home that contribute to reading literacy development.

Economic, Social, and Educational Resources

Research consistently shows a strong positive relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status, or indicators of socioeconomic status such as parents' or caregivers' occupation or level of education (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Willms, 2006). Children with less exposure to books at home, parents less involved in schooling, and who are less likely to be regularly read to by parents are less likely to be good readers (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Darling & Westberg, 2004; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). An important aspect of the home environment is the availability of reading material and educational resources. Research shows that ready access to various types of printed material is strongly associated with literacy achievement (Purves & Elley, 1994). Homes that make such material available convey to children the expectation that learning to read is a desirable and worthwhile goal.

Because learning to read is dependent on children's early language experiences, the language or languages spoken at home and how they are used are important factors in reading literacy development. As formal reading instruction begins, children are likely to be at an initial disadvantage if their knowledge of the language of instruction is substantially below the expected level for their age (Scarborough, 2001). In addition, use of different languages or dialects at home and at school is related to young students' literacy development (Bialystok, 2006; Hoff & Ellidge, 2005).

Parental Emphasis on Literacy Development

Early parental involvement in children's literacy activities can impact literacy development with long-lasting effects (Levy, Gong, Hessels, Evans, & Jared, 2006; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). As young children engage in more challenging and complex activities for play and recreation, both alone and with peers, the time devoted to literacy-related activities becomes critical. Throughout a child's development, the involvement of parents or caregivers remains essential to the acquisition of reading literacy. Central to the home environment are the literacy-related activities that parents or caregivers engage in with children or encourage and support (Gadsden, 2000; Leseman & de Jong, 2001; Snow & Tabors, 1996; Weinberger, 1996). As children develop their capacity for oral language, they are learning the rules of language use. This knowledge will be translated into expectations for printed language as well.

Perhaps the most common and important early literacy activity involves adults and older children reading aloud to young children (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2008; Hart & Risley, 2003; Raikes, Pan, Luze, Tamis-LeMonda, Brooks-Gunn, Constantine, Tarullo, Raikes, & Rodriguez, 2006). When children are read aloud to and encouraged to engage with the text and pictures in books, they learn that printed text conveys meaning and that being able to read is valuable and worthwhile. Joint book reading, encouraging children to read independently, and visiting the library with children can contribute to increased levels of literacy.

As children mature, the support and guidance provided at home contributes to literacy development in many different ways. Parents' or caregivers' involvement in children's schooling is fundamental to literacy development (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002; Wells, 1985). Although it is a two-way street, parents should try to be supportive of school efforts, just as schools

need to reach out to inform, encourage, and show receptivity to parents' input. Students with parents involved in their schooling have higher academic performance than students whose parents are not involved in their schooling (Jeynes, 2005). Research shows that students who discuss their school studies and what they are reading with their parents or caregivers are higher achievers than those who do not (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003). Involved parents or caregivers can reinforce the value of learning to read, monitor children's completion of reading assignments for school, and encourage children through praise and support.

Parents' Reading Behaviors and Attitudes

For most children, the home provides modeling and direct guidance in effective literacy practices. Parents and other family members convey their beliefs and attitudes in the way they teach their children to read and to appreciate text (Baker & Scher, 2002). Parents' and caregivers' engagement in many literacy activities foster children's positive attitudes toward reading (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002). Young children who see adults and older children reading or using texts in different ways are learning to appreciate and use printed material. Beyond modeling, parents or other caregivers can directly support reading development by expressing positive opinions about reading and literacy. Parents who promote the view that reading is a valuable and meaningful activity have children who are motivated to read for pleasure.

School Contexts

Although the home can be a rich environment for developing reading literacy, for most children school remains the main location for formal learning and educational activities. By their fourth year of formal schooling, many students have acquired basic reading skills and are beginning to read more complex material with greater independence. This is due in part to the changed curricular

demands placed on students at this level. At this point, children are transitioning from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” (Chall, 1983). Students’ educational experiences may be especially significant at this point in their reading literacy development.

Many factors in school affect reading literacy acquisition, directly or indirectly. Some of the main school factors that contribute to the acquisition of reading literacy are discussed below.

School Characteristics

Schools in economically depressed neighborhoods may provide an environment less conducive to learning than schools in areas more well-to-do economically, where schools may be more likely to have strong goals emphasizing academic achievement. Depending on the country, schools in urban areas may have access to more resources (e.g., museums, libraries, bookstores) than schools in rural areas. In contrast, in some countries schools in urban areas are located in neighborhoods with considerable poverty (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Erberber, 2009; Howie, 2007; Trong, 2009; vanDiepen, Verhoeven, & Aarnoutse, 2008). Often, children from poor families attend schools in poor and distressed neighborhoods, thereby further exacerbating the effects of poverty on reading achievement.

School Organization for Instruction

Literacy-related policy and curriculum at the school level establishes the context for the formal reading instruction children receive from the beginning of formal schooling. Such policies may include decisions about the emphasis on reading instruction in relation to other content areas (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007). They also may include preferences of instructional approaches to be implemented at various stages of language development. In turn, such decisions help to shape the environment within the school and the resources that are required.

As an instructional leader, the school principal or head may promote a positive school climate and increase students' academic achievement. This leadership generally involves a clear articulation of the school's mission and managing curriculum, but can have different dimensions (Davies, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, 2007). Prominent theories of educational leadership share several key elements, such as the importance of a leader's role in communicating expectations, promoting teacher learning and development, and identifying necessary resources for planning and implementing curricular goals. For example, the principal may actively support instructional programs by participating in professional development activities and giving priority to instructional concerns. Also, the principal may facilitate collaborative efforts among teachers, use instructional research to make decisions, and encourage teachers to improve their instructional methods. As a communicator, the principal has clear goals for the school and articulates those goals to faculty and staff. School leadership also plays an important role in developing a system for monitoring and evaluating the success of the implementation of a school's goals. As a visible presence, the principal may engage in frequent classroom observations and be highly accessible to faculty and staff, providing direct assistance to teachers in their day-to-day activities.

School Climate for Learning

The school environment encompasses many factors that affect a student's learning (Sherblom, Marshall, & Sherblom, 2006). A school with a positive environment has a rigorous academic program with a coherent progression through the grade levels. The staff members show positive attitudes toward students and they are dedicated to participating in professional development. The school environment is also enhanced when staff members collaborate in curricular activities.

The sense of security that comes from having few behavior problems and little or no concern about student or teacher safety at school promotes a stable learning environment. A general lack of discipline, especially if students and teachers are afraid for their safety, does not facilitate learning.

Research has shown that good attendance by students and teachers is related to higher achievement. If students do not attend school regularly, they dramatically reduce their opportunity to learn. Previous PIRLS research has shown that students have lower achievement in schools where principals report attendance problems (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Similarly, teachers' absences reduce students' achievement (Abadzi, 2007; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007a; Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2007), and teachers being absent or leaving school before the end of the school year is an increasing problem.

School Resources

The extent and quality of school resources are also critical for quality instruction (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Lee & Barro, 2001). These may include resources as basic as trained teachers or adequate classroom space. The presence of a library or multi-media center may be particularly relevant for developing reading literacy. School libraries arranged to have rotating collections to augment classroom libraries are effective, as is collaboration between library media specialists and classroom teachers to help students use a variety of resources (U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, 2008). In addition, the school may have other specialists, such as various reading, psychology, or technology specialists that can be important in providing support for reading instruction.

Parental Involvement

The success of a school can be greatly facilitated by a cooperative attitude among school administrators, teachers, and parents (National Education Association, 2008). This cooperation, however, requires outreach by the school. Schools that encourage and welcome parental involvement are more likely to have highly involved parents than schools that do not make an effort to keep parents informed and participating in various activities. High levels of parental involvement can improve student achievement, as well as students' overall attitude toward school (Darling & Westberg, 2004; Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008; Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2000). Parental involvement may range from meeting with a teacher or attending a school open house to activities demonstrating a greater degree of involvement such as acting as a volunteer to organize or supervise a school event, serving on a committee to revise curriculum, or participating in fundraising. Helping with academic activities can range from supporting teachers with classroom activities to closely monitoring their children's schoolwork assignments.

Classroom Contexts

Even though the curricular policies and resources of the school often set the tone for accomplishment in the classroom, students' day-to-day classroom activities are likely to have a more direct impact on their reading development than the school environment. The instructional approaches and materials used are clearly important to establishing teaching and learning patterns in the classroom, including the curriculum, the strategies employed to teach it, and the availability of books, technology, and other resources. The teacher, of course, is another very influential determinant of the classroom environment (Lundberg & Linnakyla, 1993; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). This can include his or her preparation and training, use of particular instructional approaches, and experience in teaching reading.

Finally, the behaviors, attitudes, and literacy level of students in the classroom may influence the teacher's instructional choices, thereby affecting a student's reading development (Kurtz-Costes & Schneider, 1994; Nichols, Zellner, Rupley, Wilson, Kim, Murgan, & Young, 2005).

Teacher Education and Development

The qualification and competence of teachers can be critical, and prospective teachers need coursework to gain knowledge and understanding about how students learn to read, as well as about effective pedagogy in teaching reading. They also need experience in schools as part of their training, and a good induction process when they enter the profession. Much has been written about what makes a teacher effective. One issue is the nature, amount, and content of teachers' training and education (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For example, whether or not a teacher has been extensively trained in teaching reading may be especially relevant for students' acquisition of reading literacy. In the 21st century, it is more important than ever for a teacher to have extensive content and curriculum knowledge as well as pedagogical knowledge, knowledge about learners and their characteristics, and knowledge about information technology (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ertmer, 2003).

The extent of teachers' continuing education and exposure to recent developments within the field of teaching reading is also important. Professional development through seminars, workshops, conferences, and professional journals can help teachers to increase their effectiveness and broaden their knowledge of reading literacy acquisition (Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney, 2008; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). In some countries and jurisdictions, teachers are required to participate in such activities. Moreover, it has been suggested that the profession of teaching is one that requires lifelong learning, and that the most

effective teachers continue to acquire new knowledge and skills throughout their careers.

Teacher Characteristics and Attitudes

Teachers' personal characteristics and the attitudes they bring to the classroom can shape their students' learning experience. To a large extent, demographic characteristics of the teacher population may reflect educational contexts, policies, and reforms and vary across countries and regions (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Research has shown that some teacher characteristics, such as training, certification, experience, and their attitudes towards teaching are particularly important to student's academic success (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007b; Croninger, Rice, Rathbun, & Nishio, 2007; Palardy, & Rumberger, 2008).

A teacher's effectiveness in the classroom can be influenced by the climate and available resources at their school. A positive school environment can lead to greater teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction, which in turn can increase student learning (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Ware, & Kitsantas, 2007). Schools can support teachers in many ways. One important type of support in teaching can be collaboration with colleagues, which can be important in fostering a professional community where instructional ideas and innovations are shared (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). A growing aspect of instruction is the use of technology in the classroom, and teachers' familiarity and comfort with technology is increasingly important. Teachers' decisions to use technology in the classroom can result from their beliefs and attitudes, as well as access to training and materials (Russell, Bebell, O'Dwyer, & O'Connor, 2003).

Classroom Characteristics

Because young students spend many hours each day in one or more classrooms, the classroom environment and structure can have a significant influence on reading literacy development. One fundamental characteristic that may dictate how teachers approach instruction is class size, or teacher-to-student ratio. Some research has indicated that smaller class sizes during the early years of schooling may benefit students' reading development (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005).

The classroom can vary greatly, from highly structured and teacher-centered to more open and student-centered. Also related to reading development is the interaction among students, informally and in classroom discussion of reading and literacy-related activities (Baker, 1991; Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000; Gambrell & Almasi, 1997; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Classrooms that encourage language development and establish a supportive environment for talking about reading may be especially effective.

The characteristics of the students themselves can be very important to the classroom atmosphere. Students need to be healthy and to have the prerequisite skills before they can make gains in reading achievement. A classroom full of alert, well-fed students will be more ready to learn than tired, hungry students suffering from malnutrition (Taras, 2005). Because prior knowledge guides learning, effective teachers assess students' language skills and conceptual understanding, and link new ideas, skills, and competencies to prior understandings (Pressley, 2006). Finally, to be motivated readers, students need to enjoy books, happily read independently, and be intent on gaining meaning from whatever they are reading.

Instructional Materials and Technology

Another aspect of the classroom that is relevant for reading literacy includes the extent of the variety and richness of the reading material available to students. The reading material and technology that teachers use in reading instruction form the core of students' reading experience in school.

The presence of a classroom library or a special place for independent reading may foster positive reading habits and attitudes, in addition to giving students ready access to a wide variety of texts and text types. Also, in many countries, computers are widely available in schools and Internet access is steadily increasing. The use of electronic texts and other technologies is emerging as an important part of students' literacy learning (Kamil, Intrator, & Kim, 2000; Labbo & Kuhn, 1998; McKenna, 1998). Reading "on-line" is becoming an essential literacy skill as more and more diverse types of texts and information are made available to students through the Internet and other electronic modes of communication. Regardless of format, research has indicated that the students' exposure to a variety of texts and text types is associated with achievement in reading (Moats, 1999).

Instructional Strategies and Activities

The effective classroom discusses conceptual themes, has hands-on experiences related to reading, and provides time for extended reading (Guthrie, 2004). Teachers use an abundance of interesting texts, including literary chapter books and information trade books, that include such features as a table of contents, index, illustrations, and bold headings. There are innumerable strategies and activities that teachers may use for reading instruction (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Creighton, 1997; Dole, Nokes, & Dritis, 2009; Langer, 1995; Pressley, 2000; Stierer & Maybin, 1994). Much research has been devoted to investigating which reading instructional activities are

most effective. Most educators and researchers agree that using elements of various approaches may be best, particularly when teachers tailor them to the needs of their students (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Effective instruction provides a balanced program integrating many components, including multiple texts, teacher- and student-led discussions, guided instruction, group and independent reading decoding and comprehensions strategies, and a variety of assessment techniques (Gambrell & Mazzoni, 2003). It is important to support students' collaboration and discourse around a variety of text types to clarify understanding, including searching for information and summarizing the overall messages.

Research has shown that increasing students' motivation increases the time they spend reading and their engagement with their reading, which in turn increases reading comprehension. Students learn best when they are interested and involved. Major instructional practices that increase motivation for reading and reading comprehension include setting goals, providing interesting texts, affording students choices about what they read, and providing extrinsic rewards and praise (Guthrie, Wigfield, Humenick, Perencevich, Taboada, & Barbosa, 2006; Miller & Faircloth, 2009). To move students from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, teachers can give students knowledge-building experiences based on content, vocabulary, and plenty of silent reading, and can express genuine care for their students' cognitive, emotional, and physical needs. It is important to increase students' self-esteem and self-efficacy as readers by asking them to share and explain their opinions and to initiate literacy projects.

Homework is a way to extend instruction and assess student progress. The types of homework assignments assigned in reading classes regularly include independent reading, comprehension questions about what students have read, or some combination

of the two. The amount of homework assigned for reading varies both within and across countries. In some countries, homework is assigned typically to students who need the most practice—those who tend to have the most difficulty reading or understanding what they have read. In other countries, students receive homework as enrichment exercises. Time spent on homework generally has an inverse relationship with achievement (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Those students for whom reading is difficult require more time to complete the assigned homework.

Assessment

In addition to homework, teachers have a number of ways to monitor student progress and achievement. Informal assessment during instruction helps the teacher to identify needs of particular individuals, or to evaluate the pace of the presentation of concepts and materials (Lipson & Wixson, 1997). Formal tests, both teacher-made and standardized assessments, typically are used to make important decisions about the students, such as grades or marks, promotion, or tracking (Kennedy, Mullis, Martin, & Trong, 2007). The types of question included in tests and quizzes can send strong signals to students about what is important. For example, teachers can ask about a variety of textual information, such as facts, ideas, character motivations, and comparisons with other materials or personal experiences. Teachers also can use a variety of test formats ranging from multiple-choice questions to essays.

Student Characteristics and Attitudes

Student Reading Literacy Behaviors

As children continue to develop reading literacy, the time they devote to reading and other recreational activities becomes significant. The child not only enjoys reading for recreation but also practices skills that are being learned. Reading for fun or to investigate topics of

interest is the hallmark of lifelong reading. Children should read frequently and for different purposes (Duke, 2004). Thus, children may choose to spend their out-of-school time reading books or magazines, looking up information on the Internet, or going to a local library to read or take out books (Shapiro & Whitney, 1997).

Independent reading and discussing reading can be an integral part of the ongoing activities in the home. Children's parents and caregivers can encourage them to strike a balance between time spent on literacy-related activities and time spent on perhaps less enriching pastimes such as playing video games or watching excessive amounts of television (National Reading Panel, 2000). Some research indicates a negative correlation between time spent watching television and reading achievement, while time spent reading for fun is positively correlated (Van der Voort, 2001).

Reading literacy goes beyond the ability to construct meaning from a variety of texts to encompass behaviors and attitudes that support lifelong reading. Such behaviors and attitudes contribute to the full realization of the individual's potential within a literate society. Children who are good readers report not only reading frequently, but also participating in the social aspects of reading, including reading to others at home, going to the library, and talking about books (Sainsbury and Schagen, 2004).

Discussing reading with their families, friends, and community members gives children the opportunity to participate in one or more communities of readers (Baker, 2003; Beck & McKeown, 2001). These social interactions strengthen young readers' abilities to gain meaning from text and understand how different readers can make different interpretations. Young readers and their friends can be encouraged to take advantage of extracurricular activities promoting literacy skills provided through school and local libraries or other venues. The influence of peers can be helpful in making it desirable

to participate in such activities. For example, students can share experiences and interpretations of text by attending plays or joining book clubs.

Positive Attitudes Toward Reading

A positive attitude toward reading may be among the most important attributes of a lifelong reader. Children who read well typically display a more positive attitude than do children who have not had a great deal of success with reading (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Children who have developed positive attitudes and self-concepts regarding reading are also more likely to choose reading for recreation. Such reading activities may further build up students' interests and confidences in reading (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). When children read on their own time they are not only demonstrating a positive attitude, they are also gaining valuable experience in reading different types of texts that further their development as proficient readers (Leppänen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2005).

Student Attitudes Toward Learning to Read

Research, including the results from both PIRLS assessments, has shown that children with greater self-efficacy or higher self-esteem about themselves as readers typically are better readers (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003; Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Because motivation to learn to read includes feeling that you can succeed, it is important for students to have a strong self-concept about their reading ability in order to continue building on current levels of learning to move to higher plateaus (McLaughlin, McGrath, Burian-Fitzgerald, Lanahan, Scotchmer, Enyeart, & Salganik, 2005). Successful readers enjoy challenging reading. Fluent reading involves understanding the meaning of a text beyond simple decoding and word recognition, which requires

practice with a variety of texts (Pressley, 2006). Learning to read well involves spending considerable time reading, and students' value for reading and their preferences for reading materials can influence the time they spend reading both in and outside of school. Motivation to learn to read involves being interested or engaged in what is being read. Personal interest in a subject motivates the learner and facilitates the learner in going beyond surface level information.