The Research Supporting Shift 1: Complex Text

Primary Research


   Relevant findings:
   - The ability to comprehend complex text is the factor that differentiates college-ready readers. (pg. 15-17)
   - Question type (literal vs. inferential thinking, main idea vs. supporting details, etc.) did not differentiate college-ready readers (pg. 13-16)
   - Only 51% of students who took the ACT in 2006 demonstrated college readiness in reading, with great disparities between ethnic and income groups. (pg. 1 – 2)
   - Of those students not meeting the ACT Reading Benchmark, only 5% met the ACT Science Benchmark, implying that reading is crucial to success across the curriculum (pg. 25)


   Relevant findings:
   - Analyzed more than 1300 retired state test passages finding that as text complexity increases, student scores decline.
   - Showed that six different tools can be used for quantitative measurement of text complexity, with consistent results.


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Relevant finding:

- Measured median complexity of 12th grade texts as 1130L. (Williamson et al. 2012 pg. 3). College and career texts showed a median complexity of 1300L. (Stenner et al 2012 pg. 3). Thus the difference between grade 12 and post-secondary levels was 170 Lexiles, greater than the difference between 6th grade and 10th grade medians (130 Lexiles).

Please Note: Quantitative measures, while important are not sufficient for evaluating text complexity. Appendix A of The Common Core State Standards for ELA/Literacy calls for a 3-part model of text complexity, including quantitative and qualitative measures and reader and task considerations. (pg. 4 – 16)

The Research Supporting Vocabulary in Complex Text

Primary Research


Relevant finding:

- Scores on NAEP vocabulary questions strongly correlated with scores in NAEP reading comprehension, demonstrating a strong link between vocabulary and comprehension. (pg. 5)


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Relevant finding:

- Vocabulary and syntax are the features of complex text that likely cause the greatest difficulty. (pg. 50)


Relevant finding:

- Before having entered school, low-income children in this study heard more than 30 million fewer words than higher-income peers and had vocabularies half or less the size of wealthier peers.


Relevant finding:

- Presents a framework for understanding the role of academic vocabulary acquisition in "Mathew Effects" in education, i.e., the tendency for the reading gap between stronger readers and weaker readers to grow the longer they are in school.


Relevant finding:

- In these two related works, Adams draws on recent research to show how vocabulary growth is essential to academic success.
For additional research, see also:

**Complex Text**


**Vocabulary**


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