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***Children's Reading: Comprehension and Assessment***

Scott G. Paris & Steven A. Stahl, Editors

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*Children's Reading: Comprehension and Assessment* emerged from the presentations in a conference held to promote lively exchanges of ideas on reading comprehension and assessment in the early stages of development. Some distinctive features of this volume include linking past, present, and future of reading comprehension research; balancing theory, practice, and policy; linking assessment and instruction; and other influential factors of pre-schoolers' reading comprehension.

Each section is comprised of four chapters, beginning with an original study, continuing with discussions and recommendations, and ending with several potential research areas. The last chapter of each section offers commentary by an expert which links the previous three chapters together, reviews key points, criticizes the controversial issues, and concludes with practical suggestions.

The first section provides "Historical and Theoretical Foundations" of assessing reading comprehension. Accordingly, Chapter One by Sweet represents a range of methodological perspectives in the field of reading, pointing out the inadequacies of the existing comprehension assessment. In Chapter Two, Pearson and Hamm provide extensive information regarding the present status of assessing reading comprehension through historical accounts, and they raise relevant questions for further research. Kintsch and Kintsch, in Chapter Three, put forward a model of reading comprehension, and identify the factors that make reading comprehension difficult; they write: "Comprehension is not a single unitary process. It requires the delicate interaction of several component processes" (p. 71). They also specify three levels of the comprehension process in reading through examples and figures. Being in agreement with Sweet, Kintsch and Kintsch also claim that current comprehension tests, despite their user-friendly nature, do not measure the whole understanding of the comprehension process. The last chapter of this section, "Comprehension as a Nonunitary Construct," emphasizes the importance of the theory in developing comprehension assessments. In this chapter, Duke reviews the previous studies and concludes that the comprehension process involves a number of sub-skills that vary by type, topic of the text, and the purpose of the reader.

The second section examines the "Developmental and Motivational Factors in Reading Comprehension." In Chapter Five, Broek et al. illustrate the improvement of reading comprehension and basic literacy skills in pre-school and early elementary school children, believing that the two skills develop side by side. The researchers describe ways to develop a

methodology for assessing comprehension skills as well as three principles for assessing comprehension skills in pre-school children. Chapter Six reviews some correlational studies on children's reading comprehension from a different perspective. The authors differentiate between teachers' and researchers' measurement of reading comprehension in terms of classroom practices and systematic processes, arguing that there are many early skills that can predict later reading comprehension. In Chapter Seven, Stahl and Hiebert focus on some word factors that may cause problems for reading-comprehension assessment. They suggest that comprehension-test developers search for alternative factors in texts for young readers. Chapter Eight discusses the "Roles of Motivation and Engagement in Reading Comprehension Assessment," which, according to Guthrie and Wigfield, has rarely been introduced as a major topic for discussion. The scholars review the features of the assessment situation while indicating that the assessment of reading motivation be incorporated into the assessment of children's reading comprehension. In the last chapter "Comprehending through Composing," Calfee and Miller explore assessment, construction, and composition. In support of Durkin (1978), they believe that there is something wrong with comprehension instruction in the elementary grades, and they advise more research on composition instruction issues.

The third section of the book is about assessment in school contexts integrating the reading assessment results with reading instruction in schools. In Chapter Ten, Taylor and Pearson focus on reading instruction and achievement through comprehension scores, and find effective changes in the teaching of the school staff and students' performance from year one to year two by using assessment data. Chapter Eleven throws new light on the issue: Palincsar, Magnusson, Pesko, and Hamlin examine the nature of subject matter in text-comprehension assessments. Through exploratory research, they discover elementary students' comprehension of domain-specific texts, and distinguish the important role of prior knowledge in measuring reading comprehension skills. Chapter Twelve places particular emphasis on reliability and validity in early-reading assessments. Carpenter and Paris believe that diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties in kindergarten may improve reading achievement. They also point out that assessment of some essential skills can help teachers and parents to be informed about children's strengths and weaknesses. The last chapter of Section Three provides an overview of Chapters Ten, Eleven, and Twelve, and offers incisive comments on three important directions in comprehension assessment research. In this chapter, Pressley and Hilden systematically evaluate related studies, and believe that these studies provide readers with innovative and motivating ideas in early comprehension assessment, reading assessment, and teaching reading.

The fourth section of the book deals with more practical topics in reading comprehension assessment. It examines large-scale assessments of reading comprehension that integrate the external assessment scores into internal ones. Chapter Fourteen deals with the assessment of young children as they learn to read and write. Salinger claims that the current tests to evaluate young learners are problematic, and calls for a rigorous training system and long-term professional development for the teachers who will implement the system in their classes. Chapter Fifteen, "Considering the Use of Multiple Item Formats to Assess Reading Comprehension," by Campbell, provides evidence for the claim that the assessment of reading comprehension requires multiple-item formats. Campbell argues that measuring reading comprehension with single instruments will restrict the interpretation of the test results, and recommends the incorporation of investigations of process validity into test development procedures. In Chapter Sixteen, Francis, Fletcher, Catts, and Tomblin examine "Dimensions Affecting the Assessment of Reading Comprehension." They believe in multidimensionality in reading comprehension assessment, and that assessment results affects instruction, arguing that the variation of presentation and response formats influences

the results obtained from reading comprehension assessment. Chapter Seventeen, the final chapter, is a perceptive commentary article on Salinger's, Campbell's, Francis's, Fletcher's, Catts's, and Tomblin's work. Wixson and Carlisle highlight some points, such as the need for multidimensional assessments in order to reflect authentic reading comprehension processes and activities, linking component skills to the construct of reading, observing acceptable criteria for construct and consequential validity, and extending the study of response and presentation formats to cover various contexts of reading.

The unique features of the book as mentioned in the first paragraph make it a valuable source for different groups of researchers (i.e., graduate students, experts, novice researchers, primary school teachers, and instructors of the research courses). Graduate students can benefit from the research questions and commentary chapters. Experts working on the related field may take advantage of the results, comments, and discussions, while novice researchers may find interesting subjects, illuminating procedures, and the discriminating remarks beneficial to their studies. Kindergarten and primary-school teachers can make use of the results to consider the early diagnosis of comprehension problems as their center of attention. And finally, instructors of research courses may benefit from the procedures of studies as instructive samples to guide their students. Overall, this book by Paris and Stahl is an outstanding work, and is quite well organized in bridging theory to practice and past to present.

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## REFERENCE

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