

# Comprehending comprehension: Receptive Language as an outdated and inaccurate concept

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**-Special areas of  
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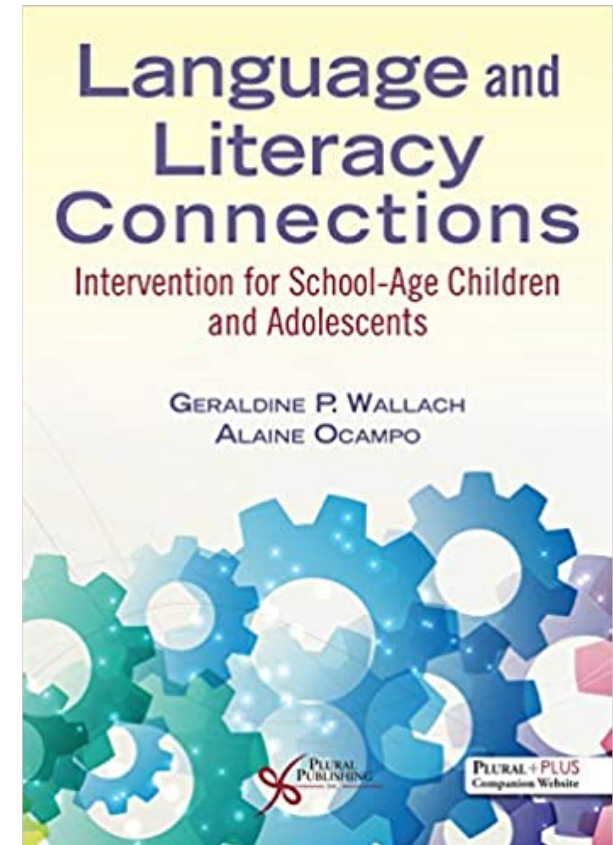
**Special areas of  
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Language-Based  
Learning Disabilities,  
School – Based  
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Autism,  
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Intersection of CLD  
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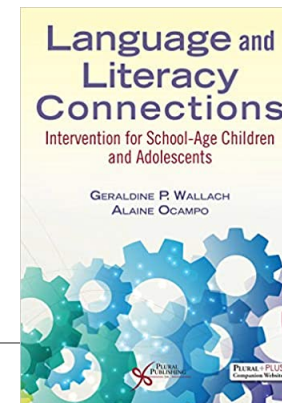
# Disclosure Statement

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# How can this book help you?

- Case exercises (related to Ax & Tx)
- Practical applications:
  - a) To help students across disorders find meaning from text
  - b) To facilitate the integration of spoken and written language comprehension as a key element for creating more effective intervention directions.

# Learner Outcomes from Brief Presentation

- Describe how the term “receptive language” is an outdated and accurate concept through the paradigm of constructive comprehension.
- Apply the multidimensional model of reading comprehension across school-age populations during assessment and intervention practices.

## 4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1) Language disorders reside *inside* and *outside* of kids' heads (Nelson)
- 2) Understand the Role of Contextualized and Decontextualized Language in Assessment & Intervention
- 3) The road to literacy is a long one that moves from FOUNDATIONAL literacy, through CONTENT literacy to DISCIPLINARY literacy
- 4) Comprehension is a dynamic, non-linear process

## **PRINCIPLE 1:**

Language disorders reside *inside* and *outside* of kids' heads...

(Nelson)



### **CONSIDER:**

- The use of the outdated term "receptive" language misses the point about what is meant by constructive comprehension.
- It keeps SLPs a bit distanced from reading comprehension.

### **IMPLICATION FOR SLPS**

Use the term *spoken language comprehension* in all reports and discussions with colleagues.

When SLPs talk about reading comprehension, the link may become more relevant and explicit!

## **PRINCIPLE 1 (continued) :**

Language disorders reside *inside* and *outside* of kids' heads  
(Nelson)

### **CONSIDER:**

The comprehension and retention of information is a complex interaction between OLD and NEW information.

It's a process of constructing meaning.

### **IMPLICATION FOR SLPS**

As suggested in the previous principle, when asking why my student "doesn't get it" look at the materials, tasks and other external supports the student needs to "get it."



## PRINCIPLE 2:

### The Role of Contextualized and Decontextualized Language in Assessment & Intervention

#### CONSIDER:

- Whether talking about spoken or written language, the issue of “contextualization” is critical. The context is what “surrounds” spoken language.
- Those with comprehension issues pay closer attention to the **context** than to the words themselves.

#### IMPLICATION FOR SLPS:

- Carefully control the context and embed language carefully within that context initially.  
  
---Don't jump into the language first especially for students who cannot manage incoming information.

## PRINCIPLE 2 continued:

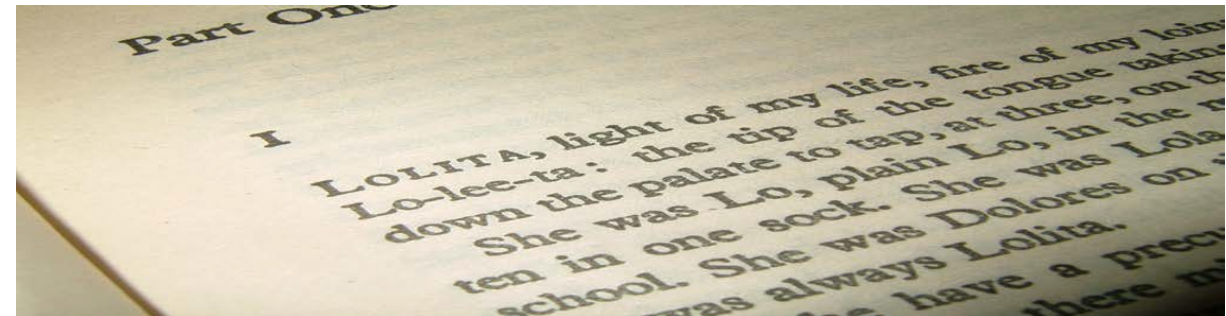
### The Role of Contextualized and Decontextualized Language...

#### CONSIDER:

- The written word has context but, print involves “language on top of language.”
- The words of an author build upon one another to form a linguistic context to get to overall meaning.

#### IMPLICATION FOR SLP:

- Look at the way texts are structured before making a decision about “what’s wrong” or not.
- Shorter passages are not always “easier.”

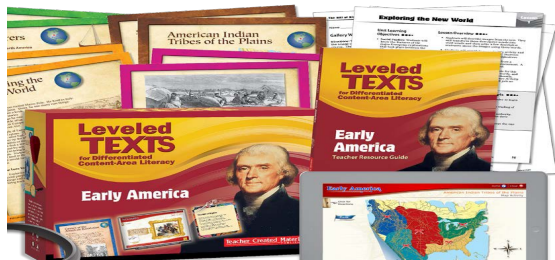


## Principle 3:

*Literacy moves from FOUNDATIONAL literacy, through CONTENT literacy to DISCIPLINARY literacy*

### CONSIDER:

*“Children learn to read, then read to learn, then they learn to read again”*



*(a la the work of Barb Ehren and Colleagues)*

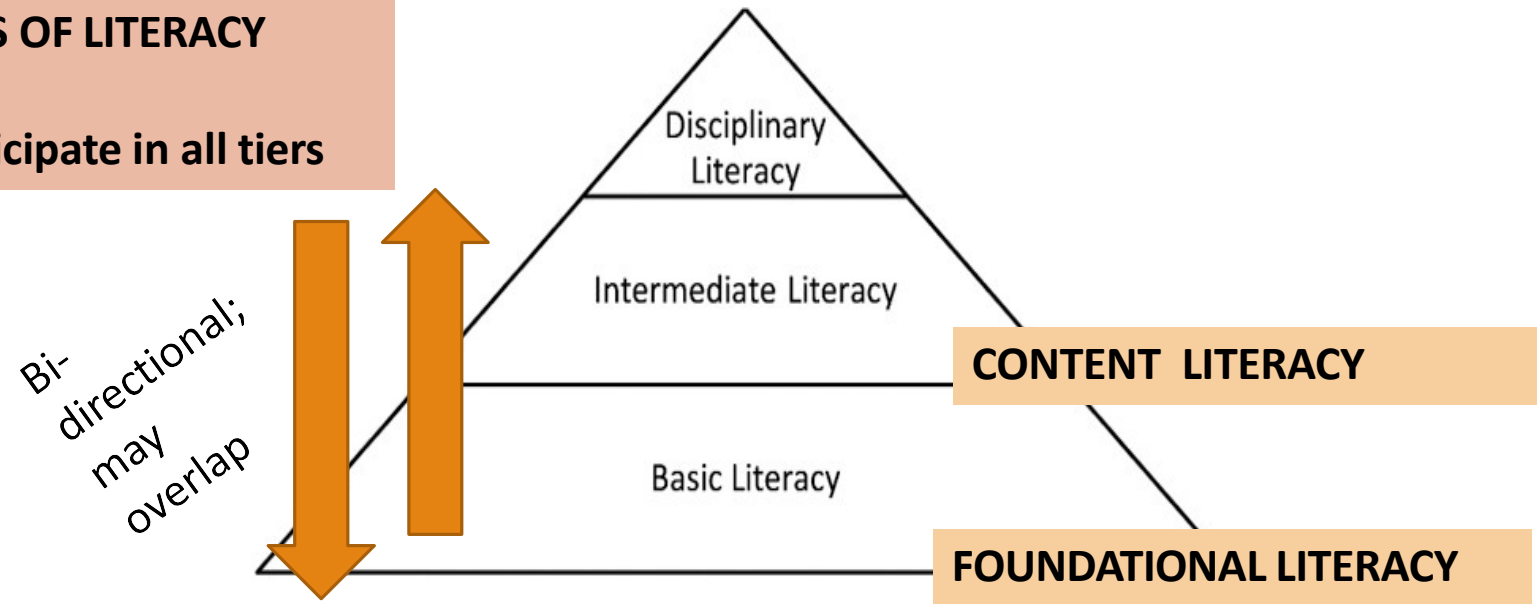
### IMPLICATION FOR SLPs

➤ Understand the different facets of literacy

➤ We need to understand the linguistic demands of **content area subjects**, find a balance among general and **discipline-specific subject areas** when writing intervention goals.

### 3 TIERS OF LITERACY

SLPS participate in all tiers



**Basic Literacy:** Literacy skills such as decoding and knowledge of high frequency words that underlie virtually all reading tasks.

**Intermediate Literacy:** Literacy skills common to many tasks, including generic comprehension strategies, common word meanings, and basic fluency.

**Disciplinary Literacy:** Literacy skills specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature, or other subject matter.

## Principle 4:

### Comprehension is a dynamic, non-linear process

#### CONSIDER:

- Multidimensional model of comprehension highlights the complex nature of spoken and written language comprehension
- It suggests that "higher" levels (e.g., syntactic, semantic and other discourse aspects) can influence "lower" levels of processing (e.g., word, decoding levels)

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR SLPS

Remember that all models of language, reading, processing, etc. are abstract representations of complex behaviors in the real world.

*[Use caution when developing a sequence of "steps" in intervention]*

## PRINCIPLE 4 continued...

### Comprehension is a dynamic, non-linear process

#### CONSIDER:

- A multidimensional model of reading comprehension takes into account the **READER**, the **TEXT**, and the **ACTIVITY**

(a la work Keenan & Colleagues)

#### ➤ IMPLICATIONS FOR SLPs

- Assessment and intervention decisions should go beyond numbers and scores on tests (which are a reality, we understand)...
- Consider the role of outside contexts, tasks and materials used to determine a student's status.

## Kids may “look different” as readers and “comprehenders” based upon:

(Keenan et al.)

- 
- a) the type of text** they are being asked to read  
(narrative, expository)
  - b) the familiarity** (or not) of the content  
(lots or no background knowledge)
  - c) what they are being asked to do** (recall verbatim,  
provide a detail, an inference - - and what kind of inference?)

*(We could say the same for spoken language!)*

# Form / Genre of the Text

## ➤ UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NARRATIVE and EXPOSITORY TEXT

(NARRATIVE: PERSONAL, IMAGINARY, ETC.)

(EXPOSITORY: DESCRIPTIVE, ENUMERATIVE, CAUSE- EFFECT, PROBLEM SOLUTION, COMPARE- CONTRAST)

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR SLPS

- Does the student perform equally well on a narrative compared to expository text?
- Why or why not?



# View Assessment and Intervention from within a Broader Framework

(Refer to Principles for guidance)

- Go beyond formal tools to understand how your students access curricular materials
- Consider the student's ability to comprehend content-area subjects via your linguistic analysis across and within subjects
- Understand our role as SLPs: Need to understand tasks from the tests used and what the “information” from the scores are “claiming” — (think mental models of situations that dynamically change across passages, etc.)

(Based upon work by Keenan & Meenan)

# Ask yourself: What does the task require?

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Textbook language- Places metalinguistic demands upon students from both content (have to learn and attend carefully to new curricular information) and structural aspects (have to navigate through complex structures and unfamiliar words).

➤ **Consider:** The “*Meta*” –factor

The ability to reflect upon language consciously, make judgments about language, manipulate language segments and put them back together (like phonics and other decoding activities) among other language tasks, involves **METALINGUISTIC SKILL**, or language awareness (van Kleeck, 1994).

## Keenan's work: KNOW what you are testing...

- Background knowledge = tremendous influence upon comprehension  
(e.g., He opened the hood and saw the *pistons*.): Make an inference = part of a car!
- Inferences = important (what kinds ...central info., peripheral, funny, unexpected???)
- Passage length = shorter can be tricky esp. When decoding is an issue (e.g., magician vs. musician)
- Retell tasks = what is “correct”/meaning? Are products, not process!

## LOOK AT TEXT BEING USED:

What are my tests testing?

How much “reading” is required?

- As part of their evaluations, SLPs might consider the distinction between *Independent* vs. *Dependent* texts
- A “one size fits all” approach to both spoken and written comprehension warrants re-evaluation (Wallach)



# A Scenario

to help you  
apply guiding principles in  
Intervention

# Scenario 1: Background Information

- Brad = 11 y.o. (5<sup>th</sup> grade/Gen. Ed.); History of preschool language disorder; dx of Specific Language Impairment (SLP)
- In kindergarten: “minor” problems with attention and comprehending instructions; early literacy skills “delayed”
- Struggled in Grades 1 & 2 but his academic problems became more pronounced in Grades 3 & 4.
- Per teacher - difficulty following spoken and written classroom directions (two step directions, specifically), slow decoder and poor comprehension of written text (in general), disorganized writing, problems with double meaning, poor auditory memory. He is completely lost in social studies.

## Select Possible Goal Area(s):

- a) Vocabulary
- b) Syntax-focused/Micro-level aspects
- c) 2-step directions

*Hint: Think connected language across multiple discourse genres.*






# Possible Interventions (continued)

## Engage students in “Meta”-thinking

### TWA (Mason et al., 2006)

TWA	
<b>T</b>	Think Before Reading
	Think about:
	The Author's Purpose _____
	What You Know _____
	What You Want to Learn _____
<b>W</b>	While Reading
	Think about:
	Reading Speed _____
	Linking What You Know _____
	Rereading Parts _____
<b>A</b>	After Reading
	Think about:
	The Main Idea _____
	Summarizing Information _____
	What You Learned _____

### QAR (Raphael & Au, 2005)

QAR – What kind of question is it?	
	
<b>Right there</b> The answer can be found right there <b>in the text</b> .	
<b>Think and search</b> The answer is <b>in the text</b> but it may not use the same language that is used in the question and you may have to look in different places to find it.	
<b>Author and me</b> The answer is <b>not in the text</b> . You need to use your own background knowledge and what the author has told you to come up with the answer.	
<b>On my own</b> The answer is <b>not in the text</b> . You need to use your own background knowledge. You could even answer the question without reading the text. The question must 'stand alone'.	
<small>© Shanna Cameron 2009. This page is reproducible for classroom use. — adapted from Raphael (1982)</small>	

We leave you thinking  
(hopefully about):

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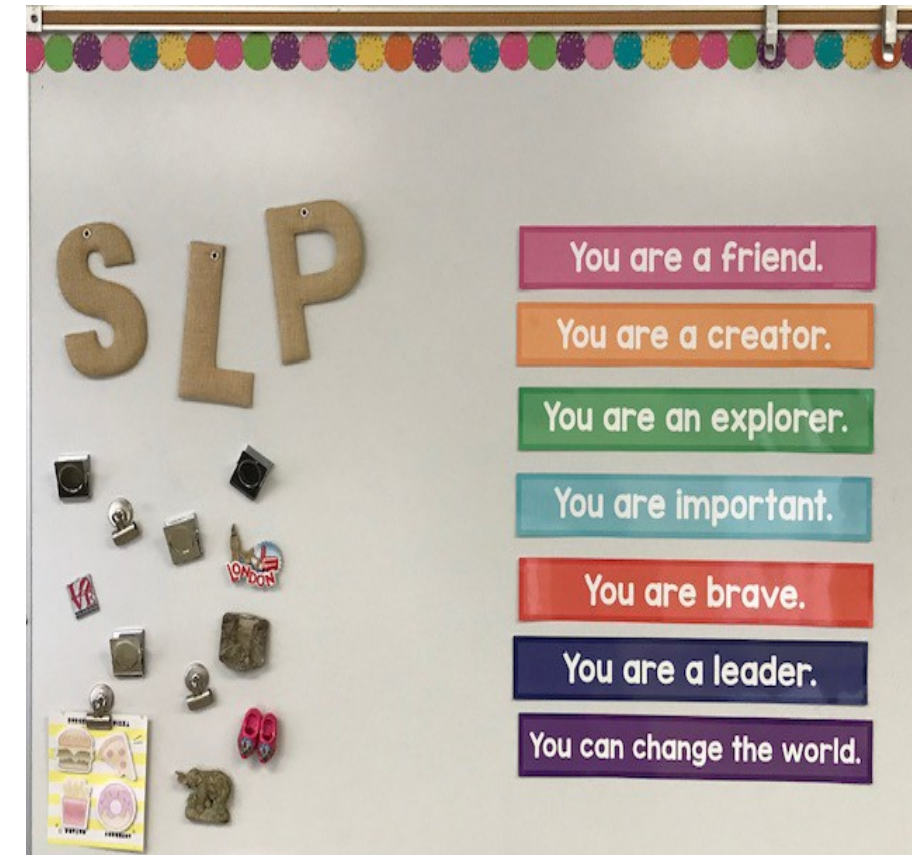
- Multidimensional Model of Comprehension
- Four Principles to guide your Assessment and Intervention
- Beyond Labels and Eligibility Categories



# Questions and Answers

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