Research Foundation for Engage Literacy *Advance Leveled Readers*

Engage Literacy Advance: Using Leveled Texts
[Based in part on *Engage Literacy: Using Leveled Texts* by Julie Zrna]

By Michael P. Ford
PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

Michael P. Ford is professor emeritus from the Department of Literacy and Language in the College of Education and Human Services at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. He spent 29 years working on reading issues and ideas with both preservice and inservice teachers. He is a former first grade and Title I Reading teacher. He is the co-author or editor of 12 books including most recently Intensifying Classroom Routines in Reading and Writing Programs *and* Guided Reading: What's New, and What's Next? *from Capstone Professional. He has also written over 40 professional articles for publications like* The Reading Teacher, Reading Today, Language Arts, *and* Reading Research and Instruction. *Michael is the former president of the Wisconsin State Reading Association.*

Engaging Students with Engage Literacy Advance

Research shows the more children read, the better readers they become (Allington, 2012; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). This may be especially true for intermediate grade readers. Once basic finite or constrained skills (e.g., concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, word identification strategies) have been acquired—usually by the end of the primary grades (Stahl, 2011)—research suggests that reading volume may be the single variable often distinguishing successful intermediate grade readers from those who continue to struggle (Stanovich, 1986). One of the best ways to engage intermediate grade students in raising their reading volume— getting them to read even more—is to make sure they know they can succeed, want to succeed, and know how to succeed (Opitz & Ford, 2014). Success often contributes to shaping a positive identity as a reader. Intermediate students who see themselves as good readers usually read more, which helps them to become even better readers. Students with positive identities and access to resources more often choose to read on their own (International Reading Association, 1999). Choosing to read independently provides more practice. Additional practice improves reading competencies. Improved reading competency leads to greater success. Having greater success builds confidence even further, making a decision to read independently more likely to happen again and keeping the self-improving cycle going.

Clearly one important goal for school reading programs is to help more intermediate students see themselves as successful readers. Achieving that outcome often begins with providing intermediate grade students with access to texts that are matched to their literacy instructional levels. Fountas and Pinnell (2016a) noted: "good teaching becomes moot if the text is at an inappropriate level." When left on their own, intermediate grade students often self-select texts that either are too difficult, leading to frustration (Kim & Guryan, 2010), or too easy, resulting in little meaningful practice (Carver & Liebert, 1995). In addition to appropriate leveled texts, intermediate grade students need instruction from an expert teacher who can support and assist them as needed to address any difficulties they may encounter. Glasswell and Ford (2011) remind educators, "the challenge of reading instruction does not reside solely in the text, but in what each teacher does to move each reader forward." The increasing complexity and difficulty of leveled texts can be used strategically with scaffolded instruction to help students move from one phase of development to the next and experience greater success with reading. With the combination of appropriate texts and supportive instruction, more intermediate grade students will develop positive identities with the beliefs, desires, and knowledge needed to be successful readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016a).

Engage Literacy Advance is a new literacy resource that incorporates precise leveling of all texts with supportive instructional lessons. It builds on the strengths of the previously published research-based program *Engage Literacy*. *Engage Literacy Advance* is authored by experienced educators. The development of *Engage Literacy Advance* was heavily influenced by the extensive literature, research, and expert opinion providing insights and ideas about the importance of the use of leveled texts with intermediate grade students.

The Literacy Development of Intermediate Grade Students

Instead of conceptualizing literacy development in distinctive stages, experts now look at development as a continuous journey along a continuum (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016b). As an alternative to thinking about *stages* of literacy development, some researchers believe it is better to think about *phases* of literacy development that students pass through on the developmental continuum. Phases are defined by the actual performance of the learner. They acknowledge the blurry lines as students continue their trajectory toward becoming proficient readers. Phases remind educators that performance varies depending on the texts being used and/or the contexts in which the reading takes place (Gentry, 2015). Different phases are often identified in common frameworks (Richardson, 2009; Ellery, 2014, Saunders-Smith, 2009, Fountas & Pinnell, 2016b). In *Engage Literacy Advance*, five phases addressed are emergent, early, early fluent, fluent, and advanced fluent. Caution needs to be exercised in assigning grade levels to these phases, but primary literacy programs often have a greater proportion of students working through the first two phases—emergent and early reading. By the time children start formal schooling, they have already developed a wealth of knowledge about the world in which they live, about the language they use, and about the print they see (Department for Education and Child Development, 2011). As possible, the primary grades build on this strong foundation to help young children acquire critical literacy skills. Most young children entering school are in the *emergent reader phase* of literacy development. They are continuing to learn how print works by acquiring understandings about concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, and phonological/phonemic awareness. These students are trying to figure out what reading and writing are as they become immersed in worlds filled with language, including oral conversations, storybook readings, environmental print, visual graphics, and explorations in writing (McGee & Richgels, 1996; Strickland & Morrow, 1988).

As young children move from learning how print works to acquiring strategies and tools needed to work with print to make meaning, they are shifting to the *early reader phase* of literacy development (Clay, 1991; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In this phase, the main—but not exclusive—focus is learning word level strategies to integrate meaning, structure, and visual sources of information to make sense of print (Clay, 1991). In this phase, instructional opportunities are provided to help students build up a bank of known high-frequency sight words, use sound-symbol patterns, analyze the structure of words, and use context clues. While there is strong attention to word level strategies, making meaning while reading and writing is always the end goal.

Once students have acquired the word level tools needed to make sense of print, they enter the *early fluent reader phase* of literacy development. Strategy use becomes increasingly more complex and automatic. In this phase, the focus shifts from acquiring tools to using those strategies to better understand texts. This phase is often a bridge between the primary and intermediate grade literacy programs. The instruction for early fluent readers should spend the greater proportion of time on helping students to make meaning with increasing comfort, confidence, and competence. Early fluent readers need to build on beginning knowledge about comprehension strategies to achieve an ability to make appropriate decisions about when, why, and how to use the strategies (Boyles, 2009). Most intermediate students have successfully negotiated the emergent, early, and early fluent phases of reading development. They have acquired the understandings of how print works, tools needed for unlocking words, and improved strategies to make sense of texts. While some intermediate students may still have needs in these areas, the greater proportion of students are moving through the early fluent phase to the fluent and advanced phases of reading development.

In the *fluent reader phase* of literacy development, students are focused on being readers and writers. Fluent readers have become competent and accomplished the critical outcomes of the other phases of literacy development. Paris (2005) observed that the constrained skills (i.e., concepts of print, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, sound-symbol relationships, basic high-frequency sight words) have been learned and mastered entirely. These skills usually do not result in significant differences among fluent readers. For the fluent reader, these skills and strategies are solidly in place. Occasionally they may need to be revisited, but instruction for fluent readers narrows to focus on other critical outcomes: vocabulary, comprehension, and composition. These are less finite or unconstrained skills. They are sometimes referred to as lifelong skills and include aspects like prior knowledge development, strategic thinking, and problem-solving strategies (Graves, Juel, Graves, & Dewitz, 2010). They are difficult to master completely since all readers can continue to improve in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, composition, world knowledge, thinking skills, and problem-solving strategies. This is especially true as fluent readers encounter a wider variety of texts at increasingly complex levels.

Finally the *advanced fluent reader* approaches proficiency. The advanced fluent reader competently, confidently, and comfortably demonstrates proficient reading skills, strategies, and behaviors. The instructional focus narrows, but the need for resources expands. If knowledge in unconstrained areas is to continue to grow, advanced fluent readers need practice with many different texts for a growing list of purposes in many different contexts (Ford, 2016). Advanced fluent readers also benefit from attention to the affective dimensions of reading. If these students are focused on being independent readers and writers, it is important that texts and instruction lead to engagement so that continued effort, enthusiasm, persistence, and self-regulation contribute to their sustained growth (Guthrie, 2014.)

Engage Literacy Advance was developed to address the important common patterns of intermediate grade readers. *Engage Literacy Advance* supports literacy development as students move from the fluent to the advanced fluent phase of literacy development. The leveled texts and supporting instructional lessons in *Engage Literacy Advance* focus on the areas of fluency, vocabulary, comprehending, and composing. Texts help fluent readers internalize and raise their strategy use to automatic levels. In general, instruction for fluent readers should focus on increasing degrees of automaticity, reading sophistication, and abilities to meet the demands of increasing text complexity.

How Can Leveled Texts Help Intermediate Grade Students' Literacy Development?

One significant impact of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is focus on preparing U.S. students for college and their future careers, thus placing a strong emphasis on students being able to meet the demands of the increasing levels of text difficulty from the early grades through high school. This focus trickled down to an assumption that giving students more challenging texts will raise reading levels and has intensified attention to issues of text complexity and the need for a gradient of text difficulty (Mesmer, Cunningham, & Hiebert, 2012) Hiebert (2014) further explained that this may be especially true for intermediate grade readers. In her research, she demonstrated that expectations for students exiting the intermediate grades (fifth grade) were now equivalent to the end of eighth grade in the past. Her analysis of CCSS revealed that 73 percent of all reading proficiency was to be gained by the end of fifth grade. *Engage Literacy Advance* is designed to address this increased expectation on intermediate grade literacy programs.

One part of the emphasis on text complexity by the CCSS is the importance placed on the inclusion of nonfiction texts in the teaching of reading. This shift in reading programs was in part due to research that suggested a significant imbalance in information versus narrative texts in elementary reading programs, especially for younger readers (Duke, 2000). This imbalance seemed even more problematic since most of the reading needed for college and career readiness was with nonfiction texts and formats (Venezky, 1982; Smith, 2000; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). One critical reason for providing access to nonfiction texts is these texts often provide different demands on the readers (Buss & Karnowski, 2002; Opitz, Ford, & Zbaracki, 2006). While access to nonfiction texts is important, students also need to receive instruction in how to meet these unique demands such as reading texts in a more analytical manner. This needs to be a focus of intermediate grade programs. Finally, one often overlooked important advantage to using more nonfiction is that informational texts are actually preferred by many intermediate grade students (Jobe & Dayton-Sakari, 2002).

Historically the purpose of reading programs in the primary grades was often characterized as helping young children *learn to read*. In the intermediate grades, the purpose of reading programs was often characterized as helping older students *read to learn* (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). More recently, experts have cautioned against dividing literacy development in these two distinct categories (Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2003; Houck & Ross, 2012). If literacy development does take place on a continuum, then all students are always learning to read though what they are learning may shift as texts, formats, and purposes become increasingly more sophisticated and complex. On the other hand, all students—no matter how young—are always using their reading to learn about themselves and the world. Since reading development changes more significantly in the primary grades where falling behind leads to major challenges in trying to catch up, instruction in the primary grades must clearly focus on the instruction of constrained skills to establish a foundation for continued success (Musen, 2010). Teachers in the primary grades, however, must also balance instruction of constrained skills with beginning the development of unconstrained, less finite areas such as vocabulary, comprehension, and composition. Intermediate programs start to shift the balance of instruction from those constrained skills to focus on the development of lifelong skills that transcend texts and enable readers to meet the demands needed to learn about themselves and their world from those texts. The instructional focus does change, but that means reading in the intermediate grades should not be seen as simply an application exercise or assignment. Students still will need explicit instruction from expert teachers

about how to be successful with these increasingly complex texts if they are to learn from them. Houck and Ross (2012) concluded: "The Common Core State Standards heavily emphasize students' ability to read complex text independently and proficiently at every level of development, from kindergarten through grade 12. This will only happen if educators explicitly teach . . . with an understanding that 'learning to read by grade 3' and 'reading to learn in grades 4–12' is not only a myth but also a disservice to the children in our care."

Another way to think about the demands placed on intermediate grade literacy programs was theorized by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008). A hierarchy of literacy requirements begins with a need to acquire a basic level of literacy to work with any text. This level is often addressed in primary programs. The primary grades spend a greater proportion of time helping students learn what reading is and the tools they need to make sense of print at the word level. Then the readers need strategies that help them think globally across any text. This second layer of literacy provides the bridge between programs in the primary and intermediate grades as they acquire the strategies they need to understand texts at broader, deeper levels. If the intermediate grade level student has successfully accomplished those outcomes, then instruction starts to shift to using skills and strategies in learning about other things from texts. Eventually, the student needs a third layer of discipline-specific literacy that helps them address the specific demands of texts that are unique in certain content areas (e.g., reading directions for a science experiment is different from reading a historical political commentary). While any text can help intermediate grade level students learn about themselves and their worlds, learning about specific subject matter content often means encountering a wide variety of informational nonfiction texts along with narrative stories and other genres.

The prime purpose of using leveled texts is to enable intermediate grade students to read books at appropriate instructional levels. Leveled texts are not linked to a particular literacy theory. Rather they assist teachers in providing students with texts that allow them to work within their Zone of Proximal Development. Vygotsky (1978) defines the Zone of Proximal Development as the maximum level of development the student can reach with assistance. When a student is assisted to work in his or her Zone of Proximal Development, higher levels of understanding occur—what the student achieved yesterday with assistance becomes what he or she can do independently today. This involves students reading texts that provide them with appropriate support as well as appropriate challenge: texts with which they can problem-solve and read without becoming frustrated or losing meaning (Rog & Burton, 2001/2002). As well as providing texts that are leveled, *Engage Literacy Advance* offers content and contexts and a variety of genres that will engage intermediate grade readers, so they will be motivated to use their strategies, prior knowledge, and experiences to learn from those texts. *Engage Literacy Advance* also offers clear curriculum links throughout the program to foster connections to discipline-specific content in science and social studies.

Texts organized into levels of difficulty provide teachers with a starting point for helping select reading materials that match intermediate grade students to appropriate texts at a pace suited to their learning (Rog & Burton, 2001/2002). With a variety of available texts at each level, the teacher is also able to make appropriate selections better suited for specific instructional experiences (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016a). However, the level is not the only consideration for matching students to texts in a specific context (Glasswell & Ford, 2011). When selecting texts, teachers also need to take into account their knowledge of what the readers will bring to the page, the demands the text will place on the reader, and variations in the context in which the reading will take place. Many variables are at play in choosing an appropriate text and subsequent instructional decisions may need to consider how to address those variables.

One distinction in working with intermediate versus younger students is the amount of support given to the reader, especially on the front end of the lesson when introducing a new text. As young readers are learning strategies to prepare for the reading of a new text, the teacher often frontloads the lesson to provide maximum support for the reader to develop background knowledge, activate prior knowledge, and find a purposeful focus for the reading (Buehl, 2014). With younger readers, the teacher often does most of the work to build a firm foundation and enable as many readers as possible to successfully read the text. If these activation and focusing strategies have been taught explicitly, modeled, and demonstrated throughout the primary grades, intermediate students should be better equipped to encounter a new text and set themselves up for a more successful reading of the text. Intermediate grade students should be able to use previously taught pre-reading strategies with less teacher oversight. The "work" for frontloading the reading of the text needs to be done by the students (Burkins & Yaris, 2016). Even in discussions of reading instructional techniques suggested by the CCSS, it is recommended that teachers provide only a minimal amount of background knowledge or explanation prior to the reading of the text (Jones, Chang, Heritage, & Tobiason, 2014). Educators will see that the lessons in *Engage Literacy Advance* are developed with an expectation of more student responsibility in negotiating the initial demands of the texts. This is also critical when intermediate grade students assume more responsibility for choosing texts and reading them independently. They will be able to sustain reading habits beyond the instructional literacy program.

State and national standards respect teachers' judgments and do not define how teachers should teach, the standards do provide expectations for children. Teachers and school districts are given the opportunity to be decision-makers in the process of determining how the standards are to be met. The use of leveled texts such as those in *Engage Literacy Advance* in a school or a school district ensures the use of consistent procedures to support a whole site approach to literacy.

How Do Leveled Texts Help Educators to Teach Effectively?

Essential in teaching and learning programs is the ability of a teacher to teach a wide and diverse range of students in the class. This may be even more important in the intermediate grades since the range of student performances expands further beyond the primary grades (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). The use of leveled texts provides the opportunity for texts to be placed into a sequence that will cater to the needs of all students by enabling them to be working at their instructional reading levels (Rog & Burton, 2001/2002, Fountas & Pinnell, 2016a). Leveled texts assist teachers to:

- group together children with similar strengths, needs, and abilities. These groups must be flexible throughout the year: As children progress and are able to work successfully with increasingly more difficult texts, they can move to more appropriate groups (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Ford & Opitz, 2008).
- cater to individual differences by allowing children to progress through increasingly more difficult texts at a pace that is suitable to their individual needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016b).
- develop a reading program centered around "authentic" tasks—reading continuous texts rather than focusing on activities with isolated letters or words (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Mooney, 1990; Holdaway, 1979).
- develop a sequence that will guide and inform their teaching (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016b).

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was convened by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) to assess, in part, research-based knowledge to various approaches to teaching children to read (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The NRP identified five essential elements to reading instruction: phonological awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, and comprehension instruction, placing all five elements at the same level of priority. The CCSS (2010), however, place a far greater emphasis on the sophistication of a text and comprehension. The use of leveled texts enables students to read at an appropriate text level that ensures comprehension is placed at the foreground of a student's reading. As Clay (2000) states: "Comprehension is very dependent upon the difficulty level of the text. It makes no sense to assess comprehension on a hard text, nor on an easy text. If the text level is instructional then that tells the teacher to teach for understanding."

In order to support learning, *Engage Literacy Advance* was developed to systematically introduce a wide range of increasingly complex texts. Through the instruction and key Depth of Knowledge elements, teachers model how to enhance meaning through active engagement in texts, as they explicitly involve children in an analysis of text structure. According to the Department for Education and Child Development (2011), as students read a wide range of texts, their ability to make meaning in speaking and listening, viewing, writing, and creating develops as well.

How Are Texts Leveled?

The levels for texts in the *Engage Literacy Advance* program were originally designed as a "Gradient of Text Difficulty" using color bands to grade texts. This "Gradient of Text Difficulty" designated texts to a color band based on the complexity and challenges contained in them. As within each color band there exists a range of texts; however, this range has been organized into a finer gradient of levels, if and when necessary.

In intermediate classrooms, students in different groups will have different strengths and flexibility, interests, and prior knowledge. The use of broader color bands will allow teachers to cater to these differences (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Since the instruction accompanying each text reflects a carefully crafted scope and sequence, it is important to consider this when selecting texts to use within a color band. While a teacher has flexibility using texts at each level, it is critical to use those texts with instructional lessons that will address the skills and strategies needed by students in a group.

While the scope and sequence of *Engage Literacy Advance* was created to provide support for skill and strategy instruction with each text, caution should be exercised in restricting access to texts that students are motivated to

read especially as their interest, purposes, and skills shift as they move along the literacy continuum. If a student is very excited about a new subject or topic captured in an available text regardless of its level that may be a perfect time for that student to read that book. Small groups may need to stay focused on specific texts to provide appropriate instruction, but other texts can be made available to students for independent reading.

Designating a text to a level is a complex process that takes into account many factors including the following (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006):
- vocabulary contained in the text,
- text features of the text,
- sentence length,
- sentence complexity,
- subject matter of the text,
- story structures, and
- language features (Calkins, 2000; Szymusiak, Sibberson & Koch, 2008).

Leveling Guide for Capstone Classroom Leveled Text

Grade Level	Developmental Level	GRL	Early Intervention Level	DRA2 Level**	Lexile* Levels	Engage
Kindergarten	Emergent	A	1			1 Magenta
Kindergarten	Emergent	B	2			2 Magenta
Kindergarten	Emergent	C	3, 4	A–3		3, 4 Red
Kindergarten/ 1st Grade	Emergent/Early	D	5, 6			5 Red 6 Yellow
	Emergent/Early	E	7, 8			7, 8 Yellow
1st Grade	Early	F	9, 10			9, 10 Blue
	Early	G	11, 12			11 Blue 12 Green
	Early	H	13, 14			13, 14 Green
	Early	I	15, 16	3–16	200–400	15 Green 16 Orange
2nd Grade	Early Fluent	J	18			17, 18 Orange
	Early Fluent	K	19, 20			19, 20 Purple
	Early Fluent	L				21, 22 Gold
	Early Fluent	M		16–28		23 Gold, 24 Silver
3rd Grade	Fluent	N				25 Silver, 26 Ruby
	Fluent	O				27, 28 Ruby
	Fluent	P		28–38	420–820	29, 30 Sapphire
4th Grade	Fluent	Q				Jade
	Fluent	R		38–40		Jade
4th/5th Grade	Fluent	S				Jade, Amethyst
5th Grade	Fluent	T				Amethyst
	Fluent	U		40–50	740–1010	Amethyst
5th/6th Grade	Fluent	V				Amethyst
6th Grade	Fluent	W				
	Fluent	X		50–60		
	Advanced Fluent	Y		60–70		
8th Grade	Advanced Fluent	Z		70–80	925–1185	

8th Grade Plus	Advanced Fluent	Z Plus				

*Level for grades 2–8 reflect updated text complexity outlined in Common Core State Standards for Language Arts.
**Suggested DRA2 levels per grade based on Pearson research. DRA2 levels have not been officially aligned to Capstone materials.

How Can Leveled Texts Be Used In Intermediate Grade Classrooms?

While one of the most important reasons for using leveled texts is the support they provide for Guided Reading in the classroom, the use of leveled texts also assists the teacher to select supportive material for Reading Aloud, Shared Reading, and Independent Reading (Ford, 2016). In fact, the use of leveled texts in multiple contexts for multiple purposes may maximize the power of their typical use in Guided Reading. Glasswell and Ford (2011) remind educators that "a much more flexible approach to using leveled texts is indeed possible in your classroom . . . being more flexible across the whole literacy block can lead to *greater* student growth, not less." Supportive texts include texts that:

- are relevant and matched to student's reading ability and interest.
- use continuous text, allowing the student to bring meaning to the reading.
- build on oral language by using authentic language.
- are culturally inclusive, relevant, and engaging with familiar topics.
- support meaning and fluency while providing enough challenge to support problem-solving.
- enable students to effectively use the three sources of information to construct meaning (comprehension) as part of the reading process (Clay, 1991). These sources of information are:
  o **Meaning** (Does that make sense?): Students use oral language, fluency, and vocabulary among other things to determine if what they read made sense.
  o **Structure** (Does that sound right?): Students use oral language and fluency to work out if what they read sounded correct in English.
  o **Visual Information** (Does that look right?): Students use alphabetic principals, phonological awareness, and knowledge of phonics to investigate the way words work.

When teachers use the leveled readers in *Engage Literacy Advance* for Guided Reading as an instructional approach to assist students to develop new strategies during reading, they select texts that are at the student's instructional reading level.

Teachers rely on the leveling of texts to help them match students with the appropriate texts for Guided Reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). By using texts that are appropriate for the student and are within each student's capabilities, teachers have the opportunity to focus on:

- teaching for problem-solving;
- teaching for phrasing and fluency, rate, and expression;
- drawing on and extending oral language and vocabulary;
- helping the students to hear and use the language and language structures of the text; and
- creating opportunities for students to use comprehension strategies.

While the teacher has the responsibility for progressing children through the text levels and up into more difficult material, it is also important to remember that students need access to a wide range of text types (Clay, 2001). Students who have the opportunity to return to reread a wide range of familiar material are able to practice putting together the complex reading behaviors they are learning to use, and they are also learning to read with more independence. It is considered vital that children have access to appropriate level texts for independent reading in order to develop their reading skills and abilities (Allington, 2002).

While not limited to use in guided reading contexts, the leveled texts in *Engage Literacy Advance* and the sequenced lessons accompanying them are best suited for small group reading instruction. One of the advantages of using appropriately leveled texts with students in small groups is they gain a better sense of what would be an appropriate leveled text to self-select in more independent reading contexts. Many experts highlight the danger of having students reading texts that are too difficult (Calkins, 2000; Routman, 2003; Kim & Guryan, 2010; Moses & Ogden, 2017), The use of leveled texts in guided reading contexts may assist students to make better choices for independent reading. They can become better at recognizing texts at a "just-the-right" level when self-selecting something of interest to them. This is important because significant student motivation to read comes from the opportunity to self-select reading material. Educators need to remember that research on intermediate students has demonstrated that

when they have the ability to choose to read in an area of interest, students can perform above expected levels (Steinkuehler, 2011).

Comprehension and Leveled Texts

Meaning is the basis for comprehension. Clay (2001) believed that meaning is the outcome and reward of the effort put into it, and it provides a purpose to reading and writing. Experts agree meaning is not just a reference to meaning at the word level of the text but rather at a deeper level—that of the author's intent. If we are to move the use of leveled texts forward, it is especially crucial that educators see beyond a focus on accuracy at the word level to using the texts to help students acquire comprehension at deeper levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). *Engage Literacy Advance* has comprehension strategy support for each leveled text in the Teacher's Resource Guide. Additionally, the program employs the use of recurring characters in the books, which helps students build on prior knowledge by linking content in a new text with content from previously read text—thus creating a comprehension thread from which to base comprehension.

It is vital that educators talk with students about the texts before, during, and after the reading and encourage the students to talk to each other at these times. This is a major means to make sure meaning is always driving the reading and students are:

- predicting by making links with their own life and prior knowledge.
- making connections with text to self, text to text, and text to world.
- questioning, clarifying, and monitoring by reassessing their thinking before, during, and after reading.
- visualizing by creating images in their minds.
- Inferring by reading between the lines.
- summarizing and synthesizing to create new knowledge and deeper understanding.
- determining the important ideas.

Students who are good readers make predictions and anticipate what is about to happen in a text before they read it. While they read, they check and verify that what they have read makes sense, and when they finish reading, they reflect on the text to extend their own experience. The connections, questions, inferences, and mental images made by students are enhanced by their oral language development. Teachers assist students with their oral language development by providing time for talk in classrooms as they listen and respond, have conversations rather than interrogations with students, and use open-ended rather than closed questions. The classroom program should provide opportunities for students to engage in discussions, ask questions, gather information, and form ideas. They need to be encouraged to express opinions and to challenge others. *Engage Literacy Advance* provides teachers with strategies for supporting students as they make predictions and read the books through the instructional design laid out in the Teacher's Resource Guide. The repertoire of comprehension and vocabulary concepts that intermediate grade level students explore in *Engage Literacy Advance* include the following: central idea, summarizing, plot development, character analysis, cause/effect, determining word meaning from context, text structure, text features, point of view, author's purpose, getting information from illustrations and other sources, evaluating evidence, text-to-text connections, prefixes and suffixes, synonyms and antonyms, figurative language, convincing precise language, Latin and Greek roots, tone, and craft.

The discussions that children have with the teacher and other students about texts deepen their understandings (comprehension). It is important that teachers develop children's speaking and listening skills as part of this process. Through listening and speaking with others, children deepen their understandings and learn from each other. All readers bring a different perspective to a text or an illustration, and when they have opportunities to share their understandings, children reconsider, reconstruct, and enhance their initial understandings.

Depth of Knowledge Framework in Leveled Texts

To enhance comprehension instruction, lessons for *Engage Literacy Advance* were also developed with attention to the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) framework (Webb, 2002). Students' responses to text-dependent questions asked during and after reading can be useful measures of their DOK about a text if teachers intentionally ask a range of critical questions with appropriate follow-up probes. There are four Depths of Knowledge, and within the *Engage Literacy Advance* instruction, students are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge at all four levels.

DOK is applied to the *Engage Literacy Advance* program during two parts of the lesson, during the comprehension focus and vocabulary focus. This is most evident in the *After Reading* portion of the lessons, where comprehension and vocabulary strategy work are featured. Since most primary students have demonstrated DOK Level One

(recognition and retell with evidence), intermediate students will demonstrate their Depth of Knowledge by moving to DOK Level Two (acquiring skills and understanding concepts). As these competencies increase, lessons will also feature DOK Level Three (strategic thinking and reasoning). Tasks at this level ask students to think more abstractly. Questions will have more than one possible answer and students must justify their responses. DOK Level Four (extend thinking) includes tasks that ask students to synthesize information from multiple sources. It often leads to connections between reading and writing. DOK Level Four is not just about having knowledge and thinking deeply about it, but also about using that knowledge to solve problems and create unique products. DOK Level Four is about creative thinking. Each DOK level provides students the opportunity to demonstrate the rigor associated with understanding complex tasks. Remember, though, that students don't "master" a Depth of Knowledge. A DOK task might be completed based on a very easy text with high student success; but given a similar task with a much harder reading passage, the product could be weaker. Depth of Knowledge is only meaningful in relation to a specific task and a specific text.

Gradual Release of Responsibility in Leveled Texts

To enhance instruction across the program, *Engage Literacy Advance* was also developed with attention to the influential Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model for designing instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The GRR model recommends that instructional programs and lesson plans within those programs consider the need to gradually turn the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student typically following a three step process: I DO, WE DO, and YOU DO (Ellery, 2014). This GRR model was built into the curricular expectations and outcomes for the *Engage Literacy Advance* program. While the same objective may be present at different levels, the demands for achieving the objective may be different due to the expected level of teacher support. The GRR is also seen in the instruction of specific strategies, skills, and behaviors embedded in the individual lesson plans for each text. The instruction often moves from teacher modeling and demonstrating to teacher and students practicing together to ending with students making applications on their own (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

The I DO phase of the instruction is often described as maximum teacher support with minimum student responsibility. However, this sometimes suggests a passive role for the student when it is very important that the student is actively engaged in listening and observing. Many students who struggle with literacy often do so because they have not had adequate demonstrations, or were not adequately engaged when those demonstrations were provided (Cambourne, 2001). In the lessons, this phase is seen when the teacher is explaining, demonstrating, and modeling the strategy, skill, or behavior the students are eventually expected to perform independently. Telling students about strategies, skills, and behaviors requires a thorough explanation that not only informs the students what the focus is, but also explains why it is important, when and where it should be used (or not), and how it works step by step. As previously stated, since many intermediate grade students have had access to quality instruction and have become competent with a wide variety of strategies, instruction in these lessons may rely less on the I DO phase of the GRR.

The WE DO phase of instruction is described more often as a partnership of learning between the teacher and the students. This can be seen in the *Getting Started with Predictions* and *Reading the Text* components of the *Engage Literacy Advance* lesson plans. In this phase the teacher works to get the students more involved—and responsible— for their own and the class's learning. It may be quite obvious how important this would be; but many times, teachers move too quickly from their explanations to an expectation that the students be able to perform independently. These lessons are designed to help scaffold student's learning through guided practice by the teacher in a group. This phase is critical to move a student from not using a strategy, skill, or behavior to being able to use it with minimal support. That is why this practice is explicitly described for the specific strategy instruction in each lesson.

The YOU DO phase of instruction implies that the teacher is always teaching for transfer (Dorn & Soffos, 2011). The instruction in these lessons is not designed as an end but as a means. The end is always to create independent, strategic readers. In the *After Reading* section of each lesson, there is an opportunity for the student to independently demonstrate his or her ability to use the strategy, skill, or behavior. Maximum responsibility for the learning has been transferred to the student, and the teacher takes a more minimal role. This often begins with independent practice in front of the teacher. The teacher still needs to monitor the student performance and provide feedback as needed. The teacher also needs to reflect on student performance to decide whether adjustments need to be made for subsequent teaching (e.g., a review of the explanation, more modeling, additional guided practice). But eventually this means the student needs to be intentionally encouraged to use what he or she has learned in other contexts and away from the reading program. Teacher monitoring of those other contexts will help show that teaching for transfer has happened and the release of responsibility is completed. Lessons in this program will provide

activities and assessment tools that can be completed by students to demonstrate their competency with the strategies.

In *Engage Literacy Advance*, you will see the influence of the GRR across the program and within individual lessons. The Gradual Release of Responsibility is a powerful way to frame any instruction and that is one reason it is at the heart of the *Engage Literacy Advance* program.

Assessment and Leveled Texts

Tracking student improvement through the levels is a reliable and valid form of assessment. Listening carefully to the oral reading of leveled texts allows the teacher to gain important information about the readers in a classroom. Monitoring an oral reading sample provides quantitative and qualitative information about the accuracy of word identification, strategies used for word identification, self-correction rates, fluency, comprehension, reading levels, and other observable reading behaviors (Opitz, Ford, & Erekson, 2011). For assessing word level strategies, *Engage Literacy Advance* provides a Running Record form based on the text of each student book to assist teachers in capturing this data. When teachers take Running Records to assess students' progress on a regular basis, they can use the information they gain to move students from one text level to the next, through the gradient of text difficulty. Students' growth and progress can be monitored, and the change in their reading development can be tracked (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). By taking and analyzing Running Records on a regular basis, teachers can determine if students are:

- actively engaging with the text.
- constantly checking on themselves to make sure the story makes sense.
- checking on their reading to make sure the sources of information they have used interact, by asking themselves:
    - Did that make sense?
    - Did that sound right?
    - Did that look right?
- making predictions about the text.
- checking their predictions.
- self-correcting if their predictions are not confirmed.
- solving tricky words as they meet them in the text.
- rereading to search, to confirm, to self-correct, and to regain fluency.

It is important that educators use the information gained through recording, scoring, and analyzing data in Running Records to inform thinking in planning subsequent instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). It can be used as a tool for responsive teaching in giving clear and explicit feedback to students. This may be even more important with intermediate grade level students as they become more engaged with goal setting and self-evaluation in guiding their reading progress (Boushey & Moser, 2009). It also provides information that is aligned with expectations from national and state standards, which can be shared with families.

Assessment in *Engage Literacy Advance* is not limited to the use of oral reading samples and the Running Records. In each lesson, students will be engaged in instructional activities to demonstrate their abilities to use the knowledge, skills, and strategies that have been taught with less teacher support and more independence. These activities may involve suggested uses of the learner's notebooks or provided Blackline Masters (BLM). These activities can also be reviewed and analyzed to provide information about intermediate grade students' engagement levels, depth of knowledge in understanding the texts, composing skills and strategies, as well as the specific strategy or skill targeted in the activity. Monitoring the "paper trail" produced through these instructional activities should also inform educators' thinking as they continue to plan to meet the needs of the students, provide specific feedback, and share information with families.

Summary

Engage Literacy Advance is a new leveled literacy resource that adheres to key findings from the extensive research base and expert opinion that has been built up over recent years on the use of leveled readers in the development of literacy. The foundation of *Engage Literacy Advance* is based on many years of expert classroom teaching and the research behind Guided Reading instruction, comprehension strategies, and literacy development to support intermediate grade level students as they become competent readers and writers. *Engage Literacy Advance* also identifies key design elements set forth in the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts, though it also correlates to state standards. From needed conventional skills and strategies for fluency, vocabulary, and

comprehension to higher-level synthesizing of literary and informational texts, the program supports teachers as they help students move through a developmental progression by providing multiple opportunities to match students with text at their instructional levels for specific purposes in a variety of contexts.

References

Allington, R. L. (2002). You can't learn much from books you can't read. *Educational Leadership, 60*, 16–19.

Allington, R. L. (2012). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs, 3rd ed.* Boston: Pearson.

Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P. T., & Fielding, L. G. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *23*, 285–303.

Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2009). *The café book: Engaging all students in daily literacy assessment and instruction.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Boyles, N. N. (2009). *Launching RTI comprehension instruction with shared reading.* North Mankato, MN: Maupin House.

Buehl, D. (2014). *Classroom strategies for interactive learning, 4th ed.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Burkins, J. M., & Yaris, K. (2016). *Who's doing the work? How to say less so your readers can do more*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Buss, K., & Karnowski, L. (2002). *Reading and writing nonfiction genres*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Calkins, L. M. (2000). *The art of teaching reading*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Cambourne, B. (2001). Conditions for literacy learning: Why do some students fail to learn to read? Ockham's razor and the conditions of learning. *The Reading Teacher*, *54*(8), 784–786.

Carver, R. P., & Liebert, R. E. (1995). The effect of reading library books at different levels of difficulty upon gain in reading ability. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *30*(1), 26–48.

Chall, J., Jacobs, V., & Baldwin, L. (1990). *The reading crisis: Why poor children fall behind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Clay, M. M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (2000). Running records for classroom teachers. Portsmouth, NH: Heienemann.

Clay, M. M. (2001). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). (2011). *Engaging in and exploring reading*. Literacy Secretariat: Adelaide.

Dorn, L. J., & Soffos, C. (2011). *Interventions that work*. Boston, MA: Pearson Higher Education.

Duke, N. K. (2000). 3.6 minutes per day: The scarcity of informational texts in first grade. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35*(2), 202–224.

Duke, N. K., & Bennett-Armistead, V. S. (2003). *Reading & writing informational texts in the primary grades.* New York: Scholastic.

Duke, N. K., Bennett-Armistead, V. S., & Roberts, E. M. (2003). *Bridging the gap between learning to read and reading to learn.* In Barone, D. & Mandel-Morrow, L. (eds.). *Literacy and young children: Research-based practices,* 226–242. New York: Guilford.

Ellery, V. (2014). *Creating strategic readers: Techniques for supporting rigorous literacy instruction*. Huntington, Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials.

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2013). *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ford, M. P. (2016). *Guided reading: What's new, and what's next?* North Mankato, MN: Capstone Professional.

Ford, M. P., & Opitz, M. F. (2008). A national survey of guided reading practices: What we can learn from primary teachers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *47*(4), 309–331.

Fountas, I. C., & and Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: good first reading for all children.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2006). *Leveled books (k–8): Matching texts to readers for effective teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2012). Guided reading: The romance and the reality. *The Reading Teacher*, *66*(4), 268–284.

Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2016a). *Guided reading: Responsive teaching across the grades, 2nd ed.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I. C., & Pinnell, G. S. (2016b). *The F & P literacy continuum: A tool for assessment, planning, and teaching.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Gentry, R. (2015, July 19). *Phase observation in PreK through grade 1: Powerful formative literacy assessment and targeted teacher.* Paper presented at the 2015 International Literacy Association Convention. (St. Louis, MO).

Glasswell, K., & Ford, M. (2011). Let's start leveling about leveling. *Language Arts*, *88* (3), 208–216.

Graves, M. F., Juel, C., Graves, B. B., & Dewitz, P. (2010). *Teaching reading in the 21st century: Motivating all learners*, 5th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Guthrie, J. (2014, June 20). *Building extended engagement for deep comprehension of disciplinary texts.* Paper presented at the 33th Annual UW Reading Research Symposium. (Milwaukee, WI).

Hiebert, E. (2014). Assumptions about complex text within the Common Core and consequences for struggling readers. Retrieved from http://textproject.org/assets/library/powerpoints/Hiebert-2014-CEC-Assumptions-about-complex-text-within-the-common-core-and-consequences-for-struggling-readers.pdf.

Holdaway, D. (1979). *The foundations of literacy*. Ashton Scholastic.

Houck, B. D., & Ross, K. (2012). Dismantling the myth of learning to read and reading to learn. *ASCD Express*, *7*(11). Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol7/711-houck.aspx.

International Reading Association. (1999). *Providing books and other print materials for classroom and school libraries*. Newark, DE: IRA.

Jobe, R., & Dayton-Sakari, M. (2002). *Info-kids: How to use nonfiction to turn reluctant readers into enthusiastic learners.* Ontario, Canada: Ashton Scholastic.

Jones, B., Chang, S., Heritage, M., & Tobiason, G. (2014). Supporting students in close reading. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing University of California, Los Angeles Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. Retrieved from http://www.csai-online.org/sites/default/files/resource/38/Supporting%20Students%20in%20Close%20Reading.pdf.

Kim, J. S., & Guryan, J. (2010). The efficacy of a voluntary summer book reading intervention for low-income Latino children from language minority families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *102*(1), 20.

McGee, L., & Richgels, D. (1996). *Literacy's beginnings*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Mesmer, H. A., Cunningham, J. W., & Hiebert, E. H. (2012). Toward a theoretical model of text complexity for the early grades: Learning from the past, anticipating the future. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *47*(3), 235–258.

Mooney, M. E. (1990). *Reading to, with, and by children*. Katonah, NY: RC Owen Publishers.

Moses, L., & Ogden, M. (2017). *What are the rest of my kids doing? Fostering independence in the K–2 reading workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Musen, L. (2010). *Early reading proficiency*. Providence, RI: Brown University.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors. Retrieved from www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Opitz, M., & Ford, M. (2014). *Engaging minds in classrooms: The surprising power of joy.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Opitz, M. F., Ford, M. P., & Erekson, J. A. (2011). *Accessible assessment: How 9 sensible techniques can power data-driven reading instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Opitz, M. F., Ford, M. P., & Zbaracki, M. D. (2006). *Books and beyond: New ways to reach readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Paris, S. G. (2005). Reinterpreting the development of reading skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *40*(2), 184–202.

Pearson, P. D., & Gallagher, G. (1983). The gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *8*(3), 112–123.

Richardson, J. (2009). *The next step in guided reading: Focused Assessments and Targeted Lessons for Helping Every Student Become a Better Reader.* New York: Scholastic.

Rog, L. J., & Burton, W. (2001/2002). Matching texts and readers: Leveling early reading materials for assessment and instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 55*(4), 348–356.

Routman, R. (2003). *Reading essentials: The specifics you need to teach reading well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Saunders-Smith, G. (2009). *The ultimate guided reading how-to book (2nd edition)*. Zephyr Press.

Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2008). Teaching disciplinary literacy to adolescents: Rethinking content-area literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, *78*(1), 40–59.

Smith, M. C. (2000). The real-world reading practices of adults. *Journal of Literacy Research, 32,* 25–32.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children committee on the prevention of reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Research Council.

Stahl, K. (2011). Applying new visions of reading development in today's classrooms. *The Reading Teacher, 65*(1), 52–56.

Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *22*, 360–407.

Steinkuehler, C. (2011). *The mismeasure of boys: Reading and online videogames* (WCER Working Paper No. 2011-3). Retrieved from the University of Wisconsin Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education.

Strickland, D. S., & Morrow, L. M. (1988). New perspective on young children learning to read and write (Emerging readers and writers). *Reading Teacher*, *42*(1), 70–71.

Szymusiak, K., Sibberson, F., & Koch, L. (2008). *Beyond leveled books: Supporting early and transitional readers in grades K–5.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, T. R. (2013). *Assessment and student success in a differentiated classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Venezky, R. L. (1982). The origins of the present-day chasm between adult literacy needs and school literacy instruction. *Visible Language, 16,* 112–127.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental process.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Webb, N. (2002). Depth-of-Knowledge levels for four content areas. Madison: Wisconsin Center for Educational Research.