



Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, Diane Lapp

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To ensure that students learn to read increasingly complex texts, teachers must understand what makes a text hard. This book focuses on the quantitative and qualitative factors of text complexity as well as the ways in which readers can be matched with texts and tasks. Examine how close readings of complex texts scaffold students understanding and allow them to develop the skills necessary to read like a detective.

Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading Details

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Jane Ono says

This book gives useful information on how to analyze the complexity of text both quantitatively and qualitatively. It also gives a protocol for close reading that will help students build their critical thinking skills.

Claudia says

Disclaimer -- I am NOT enamored of the Common Core State Standards. I'm suspicious of the direction the authors, almost all non-educators are taking us. I've read lots of wrong-headed material and seen model lessons that turned my stomach.

Also, the word 'rigor' goes all over me. Rigor means inflexible, dead. Unresponsive. I don't ever want that in my lessons.

That said, I found some comfort in this book. They took on some of the issues I'm concerned about...New Criticism as the ONLY way to analyze works? Not according to Fisher and Frey and Lapp. We'll be called upon to ask high-level questions, probing for information, leading kids back to the text for evidence. Who the heck thinks I'm NOT doing that now? The authors describe the CCSS approach as a balance of the best of New Criticism and Rosenblatt's reader response. I could live with that...I really could. But the youtube lesson by David Coleman that's supposed to be a model lesson did NOT have that balance. So, who to believe?

The whole issue of readability is another one that has me twisted up. Lexiles have been cited as the ONLY measure for choosing books at the correct level, and lexiles tell us GRAPES OF WRATH and CURIOUS GEORGE have equal complexity. Oh, really??? But, again, the authors here insist we'll be using a balance (I love to think this will be a balanced approach) of qualitative measures, like Lexiles, and quantitative concerns like structure, language, clarity, figurative language, purpose, structure, genre...They insist professional teachers, making professional decisions, will make sure texts are appropriate for the classroom.

Question types, near the end of the book, were really interesting. I can use those ideas TOMORROW when I teach.

So -- still conflicted about CCSS, because I don't trust the motives of the people behind it. But this book has reminded me my colleagues and I already provide quality reading instruction to all our students.

We shall see. Everything in this book is the authors' interpretations of the CCSS...that could all change.

Gail Bob says

A must-read for any Educator effected by the 3 Shifts of the CCSS (that's all educators in the 48 states who

have adopted the CCSS). This book helps to better ensure Shift #3 (Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary) is solid in every classroom. This book is practical in that it helps teachers to better understand the nuances that come with evaluating text complexity and does a good job of "simplifying the complexity" of this necessary skill.

Erin Fowler says

The book provides a lot of description and detail about text complexity and has some teacher suggestions. It's more of an informative book rather than a guide with ideas and resources to help with implementation.

Amy says

This book focuses primarily on what makes a text "complex." The book provides a very thorough explanation of how to analyze the difficulty of texts. At the end, the authors provide a couple of examples of "close reading" lesson plans. I found the book very informative and helpful.

Andrea Lakly says

Surprisingly good! Written in an entertaining style, this little text book takes on the issue of text complexity complicated by the Common Core standards.

Mandy Krich says

This book (published after the Common Core) is a gentle reminder that teachers need to up text complexity rather than simplify it. The authors remind us the Vygotskian method of scaffolding these more complex texts in order for students to understand the inner workings and different levels of texts. Close reading is explained and several exemplar lessons are shared.

Amy Steed says

I thought that this book was a more detailed explanation of the appendices version from the Common Core Standards. I agree that we need to expose our students to the complex thinking that readers need to do in order to make sense of text. I also agree that students need to ground their thinking based on the text. Having said that, I fear that with all of this emphasis on going back to the text, that educators will miss opportunities for some of the highest levels of thinking. Evaluating and creating are the highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. I hope that we are not forgetting to teach our students that it is also okay to think creatively and have opinions that differ from what an author intended.

Barb Keister says

Text complexity seems to be the big topic around Common Core and this book defines in depth the three dimensions: quantitative, qualitative, and reader and task. Many good strategies embedded throughout the book on analyzing texts and using complex texts in the classroom. Relieved to read that independent reading continues to be what is most important.

Beth Lind says

Text complexity is... well, complex. Some ideas to use in the classroom but mostly a lot of discussion on how to determine if a text is actually complex or not. My eyes may have glazed over a time or two.

Erin says

Since I began teaching, figuring out how to appropriately match students to texts has been a big struggle. In a high school english classroom, I have students reading anywhere from an early elementary level to a college level, and it is my job to engage them all with grade level standards and improve their reading ability.

In my teaching context, there is much emphasis placed on providing students with leveled texts based on readability formulas as the most appropriate way to support students' reading skills. This is obviously a great instructional practice for guided reading and an important part of teaching students to read in the primary grades. It is also an important instructional strategy for students who enter the secondary grades reading far below grade level. Some teachers I know have gone so far as to re-write texts to make them more accessible to students reading below grade level. I always struggled with this idea, because a) that is an egregious and unsustainable amount of work for a teacher and b) I know that students are able to extend beyond their reading level to engage with different types of texts, based on my experiences with students. Also, once students graduate high school and move on to college, they will be expected to engage with many different types of texts that are well beyond their level and teachers will not change those texts to suit students' individual needs. At the secondary level, consistently providing leveled texts seemed unrealistic and inappropriate as a primary instructional strategy. Also, saying that students can only engage with texts at their "level" seemed like an overly reductive way of understanding students and their capacity. So, needless to say, I spent many hours worrying and wondering about which instructional materials are appropriate for my high school English classroom.

Text Complexity helped me think about the many ways that texts are complex, some of which can be measured by readability formulas (such as Lexile), some of which cannot. There is also a discussion of the way the readability formulas can obscure the actual complexity of a text and can be misleading to a teacher. In this book, Fisher, Frey and Lapp argue that teachers should teach complex texts to students of varying reading levels but should provide pathways to engage with the different aspects of complexity that may confront a student when reading a text. In short, the problem is often not the complexity of the text, but it is rather instruction that does not provide students with the ability to access the text. I appreciated the thoughtful discussion of the various factors of text complexity and will undoubtedly reference it when choosing which texts to use with my class and how to teach them. As teachers, we should constantly be

analyzing text for complexity and teaching our students the same. If we provide enough support as teachers, we can work with our students to access complex text (ones which may be well beyond their "level") and to construct meaning out of these texts. As students engage in this process with the help of a teacher, they are then able to apply these skills to their independent reading and can raise their level as independent readers.

Though I would have liked to read more practical application strategies for the secondary classroom, the framework for analyzing complexity when choosing materials to study in class was very helpful to me. I would recommend this book to teachers thinking about how to engage students coming from a broad range of reading abilities in the study of complex texts.

Dawn Ulley says

Picked this as my team's summer book club. Breaks down the definition of text complexity with short passage examples. Beautiful for trainings. Premise is that "if teachers want students to access more complex texts, teachers have to teach the texts (83)."

Christine Engelbrecht says

Not bad, there is a lot of information about choosing the appropriate reading level for students and the reading assessments that lead teachers to choose the text level. The different types of assessments to determine text level on page 38 are interesting, but thus far I have not seen them implemented in any schools. Lexile seems to be too expensive for some urban and title one school systems to afford, most use rigby reading.

And the graphic organizers they have are not on their own pages to be photocopied for classroom use, which annoys me.

I also think the genre wheel on page 54 is interesting, though incomplete. I think an acting teacher of 'Reading for Pleasure' and/or 'creative writing' classes would have enough contact with YAL texts to fill in this wheel thoroughly. I think it might be a neat idea to make your own for the classroom wall. Maybe have the students do it as a beginning of year assignment, then post it on the wall for them to refer back to all year. However, The analysis of text questions on pages 96 and 121 are interesting and I think they would be helpful for classroom use.

Lindsay Bembeneck says

This text focuses on how to identify levels of a text both quantitatively and qualitatively as well as how to teach students to take part in "close" readings of texts. I agree with the importance of raising rigor in reading as addressed by the CCSS, however complex texts need to be accessible to all teachers, and teachers need extended time to analyze texts, in order to ensure raised rigor occurs in all classrooms.

Ann Poole says

Not bad...however, we already know that the Common Core is requiring deeper text complexity. I was

expecting more strategies to use in the classroom. However, it does provide a lot of detail about what text complexity is. It was also a very easy and short read.
