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*Finding the Right Texts: What Works for Beginning and Struggling Readers* (Hiebert & Sailors, 2009) is an edited volume of 12 chapters divided into three sections. Throughout the text, there is a clear focus on “students who depend on schools to become literate” (Hiebert, chapter 1, p. 2). Each chapter is based on educational research and is connected to the literature in the field. The chapters will likely appeal to different audiences. This is not a text that most people will read cover-to-cover. Rather, most readers will find a chapter or section of the text that is pertinent for their purposes. As such, it is an important collection and serves to frame the discussion about matching young and struggling readers with appropriate text. It furthers the discussion about the current mismatch in basal series with struggling readers and provides considerations for future research.

**About the Author**

Dr. Elfrieda H. Hiebert is an adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. She is a principal investigator in the National Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners, a member of the Reading Hall of Fame, and a recipient of the International Reading Association’s William S. Gray Citation of Merit for her contributions to the field of reading (2008).



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The first chapter by Hiebert sets the framework for the volume. Hiebert discusses the lack of current research on and availability of appropriate texts for beginning and struggling readers. She discusses the massive changes in basal texts over the past 20 years, which has been considerably influenced by policy decisions and rhetoric rather than empirical research. She highlights her research using the Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE). Although the discussion and presentation of this research is important to understand in order to set the framework of the text, it is somewhat confusing. For instance, figure 1.1 is lacking appropriate labels on the axes making it more difficult to interpret. However, the figure does illustrate, rather dramatically, the extreme differences between students at the top percentiles and bottom percentiles in reading high-frequency site words as measured by the TOWRE. Through her discussion of the data, it becomes clear that basal texts are designed for students above the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading achievement beginning in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and that there is currently a mismatch between the design of basal reading series and readers at and below the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile in 1<sup>st</sup> grade.

The final chapter by McGill-Franzen identifies the themes and recommendations of the volume as a whole. While it makes sense that this chapter is placed at the end of the text, we suggest that readers look at this chapter before reading the three sections. The chapter helps to organize the material in a very direct and accessible manner, thereby setting the framework for reading and understanding the remaining chapters in the text. The overall theme of this text is matching readers with appropriate level reading material. First, teachers must be able to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. From this, they must have an understanding of the types of text that will help to move students forward. Along with this, teachers must continually monitor the progress that students are making in their reading achievement. Second, teachers must understand the text features of particular genres of text in order to effectively scaffold students' learning. Third, teachers must consider and adapt to the context of reading a particular text. A teacher needs to understand the background knowledge, vocabulary development, and interest that a student

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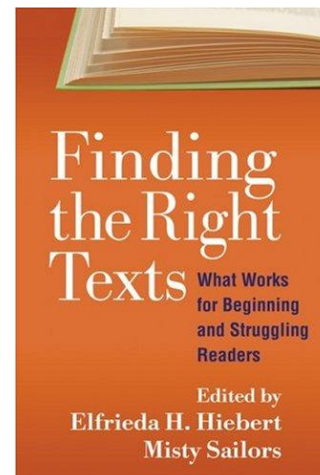
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has—all of which impact students’ comprehension of a particular text. And, finally, teachers need to plan for and find ways to increase the amount of reading that students do including issues such as access to appropriate reading material during school vacations.

Part I *Frameworks for Creating and Selecting Instructional Texts* includes three chapters. In her chapter, Adams writes about the process she was involved in as she participated in developing a basal series program. An interesting, as she terms it, epiphany that her group had was that one book did not need to meet all the needs of beginning readers. As they wrote a wish list of all of the aspects of literacy they wanted to touch on—fairly tales, nonfiction texts, poetry, etc—they realized it was not possible for one anthology or text to meet all of these needs. Rather, a series could include different types of texts serving different purposes. In a field that is often polarized, I think it is critically important to acknowledge the role of different types of texts for our beginning and struggling readers. Read alouds can serve the purpose of introducing students to various topics and building background. Student anthologies can introduce themes to students by providing several types of genres focused on a single theme. And, decodable books can serve the purpose of providing a way to have students practice their skills within a controlled environment. In addition, these types of texts can build in systematic repetition of high-frequency words and orthographic patterns (Hiebert & Martin, Chapter 3) providing additional scaffolding and support for our beginning and struggling readers.

Chapter 4 is interesting in that it tells the story of developing leveled texts in South Africa. Sailors, Hoffman, & Condon discuss the mismatch between the donated books that many South African schools receive and students’ lives. Many of the donated books are in English, which is not the children’s primary or home language. In addition, these texts often include settings and themes that do not reflect the children’s lives. The *Ithuba* Writing Project is a team of U.S. and South African writers and educators who are working together to develop appropriate leveled readers for students written in their primary languages. This chapter is particularly interesting because of its international



focus. However, it may not be relevant to many educators working within the United States.

Part II *Addressing the Content of Texts for Beginning and Struggling Readers: The Role of Informational Texts* includes three chapters examining the accessibility of content within text. In chapter 5, Cervetti and Barber discuss developing text to use within an inquiry-based science approach for teaching science content to beginning and struggling readers. For instance, they developed text with easily decodable words, high-frequency words repeated throughout the text, while introducing a limited number of core content words. These student readers are used to support students' learning of science before, during, and after hands-on investigations. By providing both accessible text and hands-on activities, students can truly begin to delve into understanding scientific concepts.

A central contention of Duke and Billman in chapter 6 is that the use of instructional text in the primary grades is an understudied area. The authors review characteristics of informational text, and factors that contribute to text complexity. Duke and Billman identify some text elements that increase the difficulty of informational materials including the more obvious word difficulty, frequency, and decodability, but also less obvious elements such as content, context, and text structure. The chapter clearly illustrates the complexities of text difficulty and the challenges in mediating difficult informational text for struggling primary readers.

The third part, *Instructional Strategies for Adapting Texts for Beginning and Struggling Readers*, includes 4 chapters focused primarily on the match between an individual student and a text. Mesmer and Cumming begin with a discussion on text-reader matching as an intervention. While not typically thought of as an intervention in and of itself, the authors discuss use of decodable text, materials with controlled vocabulary, and high-interest and low-readability (high-low) text for reading interventions with struggling readers. In chapter 9, Brown presents a concise yet in-depth review of word recognition theory. Brown discusses text-type, text difficulty, and prompts for unfamiliar words as scaffolds in word recognition for beginning readers. She

examines the inverse relationship between text difficulty and complexity, providing examples that clearly illustrate the mechanisms at play.

In chapter 10, Billman, Hilden, and Halladay point out that the challenges struggling readers face originate in various language and cognitive differences. The authors discuss various instructional strategies to supporting struggling readers. They begin by illustrating how read alouds, peer coaching, cross-age tutoring can mediate reader factors such as fluency and decoding difficulties, or lack of background knowledge. The chapter reviews instruction that prepares students to read more difficult texts, such as direct instruction in text structure, vocabulary, and summarizing, questioning, and comprehension. The authors finish by discussing models that combine strategy instruction with scaffolds for reading more difficult texts. Reciprocal Teaching, Collaborative Strategic Reading, POSSE, and Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction are all examined in this context.

Curtis focuses on literacy skills and instruction for adolescents who obviously and constantly struggle with reading in chapter 11. The author insists that a solid understanding of our students' literacy development, including what elements have developed and failed to develop, is central to our ability to determine what types of texts will best meet their needs. She examines three profiles of students: those who struggle with print fluency, those whose vocabulary is less developed than their peers, and those for whom gaining meaning from text is troublesome.

Overall, each chapter in this text can stand alone. Several chapters are written as narratives of work completed highlighting the authors' decision-making and approach for developing specific curriculum such as chapter 4 discussing The Ithuba Writing Project. Other chapters present specific practices and descriptions of these practices such as chapter 7, which describes several instructional strategies for modifying text for English Language Learners and chapter 10, which identifies approaches to mediate text difficulties for struggling readers.

The topic of critical text analysis and selection is underrepresented in the field of reading research. This volume

provides a cohesive survey of critical topics in text selection and is an important read for teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum leaders alike.

### **About the Reviewers**

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