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Israel, Susan E., and Duffy, Gerald G. (Eds.) (2009) *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension*. NY: Taylor and Francis

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Although there have been two notable books on reading comprehension, namely, *Comprehension Instruction: Research-based Best Practices* by Block and Pressley (2002) and *Improving Comprehension Instruction: Rethinking Research, Theory, and Classroom Practice* edited by Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002), the *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension* is the first handbook in this field. As the word *handbook* connotes, this book is a touchstone whose function is to capture the comprehension field past, present, and future. As one might imagine a text which is as comprehensive as the Handbook results in quite a large book. At nearly 700 pages and almost three pounds researchers will want to use their large rolling laptop bags or consider asking the publishers to make it available on the Kindle.

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As is the case in other areas of life, when looking at a handbook more than just size matters. There are two key foundational elements of a handbook, which one can use to determine its quality, one is the structure of the book and the other is the authors who contribute to the book (Calfee, 2009). With that thought in mind, the editors of this book “have assembled an extraordinary collection of authors, each distinguished in his or her own right, but as a group that is exceptional for the breadth and comprehensiveness of perspectives that they bring to bear (Calfee, 2009, p. xiv). Authors who contributed to this handbook include representatives from the areas of curriculum & instruction, linguistics, anthropology, and educational psychology. Calfee (2009) mentions in the book’s forward that this handbook is a bit heavy in the educational psychology area, but that is not surprising given educational psychology’s ability to contribute to the understanding of the cognitive complexities inherent in the field of reading and reading comprehension. The collection of well known authors whose names can be found on chapters in this handbook include the Goodmans, Harste, Alexander, Dole, Hoffman, and Allington (to name just a few) as well as a few currently lesser known graduate student co-authors who are just beginning their professional careers.

Susan E. Israel served as assistant professor at the University of Dayton and was a national faculty at the University of Notre Dame Summer Program, where she taught reading and language arts methods. She has authored, coauthored, or edited more than fifteen books.

Gerald G. Duffy is the William Moran Distinguished Professor of Reading and Literacy at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. His work focuses on studying the intersection of teacher effectiveness in literacy and the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.

When looking at the structure of the Handbook, one notices that it provides a summarization of the current body of research on theory, methods, instruction, assessment, and recognition of landmark studies. The design of the Handbook aides those who wish to deepen their understanding of the past, present, and possible future of the field of reading comprehension by organizing the text around the following seven themes (major bodies of research in reading comprehension): 1) Historical perspectives on reading comprehension; 2) Theoretical perspectives; 3) Changing views of text; 4) Elements of reading comprehension; 5) Assessing and teaching reading comprehension; 6) Cultural impact on reading comprehension; 7) Where to from here?

The breadth and comprehensiveness of the views of the authors who have contributed to this book can be seen from

the first section of the book and each proceeding section thereafter. This reviewer will use examples to from the first section (3 chapters), and the last section of the handbook (3 chapters) to illustrate points regarding the text as a whole. Starting with the first section of the book, “Historical Perspectives on Reading Comprehension”, there are three distinctly different chapters. Pearson starts the section with a chapter which was most like what I would expect from a chapter in this section. Pearson’s chapter reads like a timeline of the research and theories which were predominate in the academic literature during various time periods. The second chapter by Paris and Hamilton focuses on different perspectives of reading comprehension development in children. The third and final chapter in this section authored by Hoffman begins with the quote, “For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong” H.L.Mencken (1880-1956) which sets the tone for this chapter which addresses the “simple view” of reading comprehension, a current concern of some reading professionals. The breath and comprehensiveness of views of this collection of authors continues in much the same way throughout the remaining six sections.

Likewise the last section of volume ends with three chapters which contain three very different perspectives on where the field of reading comprehension might go from here. In the first chapter in this section (Chapter 31), Misty Sailors, an up and coming academic star from the University of Texas at San Antonio, discusses the issue of improving reading comprehension instruction through the use of quality professional development. Reading this chapter had me thinking about how the issue of quality professional development might benefit from the use of concepts and theoretical frameworks found in the expertise research. For example, I believe using the concept of *deliberate practice* (Ericsson, 2009) is key to a productive discussion about quality professional development. However, this being a new idea (manuscript in preparation), might be a better discussion left for the next edition of the handbook.

In the second chapter in this section (Chapter 32) about where the field might go from here, Cathy Roller from the

International Reading Association discusses the issues regarding public policy and her views of the future of reading comprehension research. Throughout most of the chapter she engages the reader in a discussion regarding how policy influences the work done in research and how the work done by researchers influences policy decisions. Her chapter ends on an upbeat and positive note when she points out that it is an exciting time to be doing research in comprehension and that the field is getting closer to achieving the goal of helping all children learn to read.

The third chapter in this section (Chapter 33) is authored by Duffy and Israel with contributions from ten other individuals. They use the theme of *The Tempest* to which they credit both Lee Schulman (2004) and Shakespeare. This chapter discusses the issues of contention or potential contention (“gales” and “impending gales”) as well as the unity (“calm seas”) demonstrated by the themes contained within this handbook. I would have to say that this is not a surprising revelation in that this seems to be a universal theme in the larger field of education and indeed life in general. Perhaps this is the reason that the use of Shakespearean themes works in this chapter.

So from beginning to the end this handbook appears to have both of the key foundations that I mentioned earlier, quality authors and good organizational structure and thus providing an excellent snapshot of the field of reading comprehension at the time of publication. Therefore I believe that the *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension* will be an essential reference volume for reading researchers, reading psychologists, graduate students, and reading and literacy professionals.

A second edition of the handbook is expected to be published in 2017 and it will be interesting to see how this initial edition will set the foundation for the different set of issues that will undoubtedly be addressed in the second edition. Some thoughts posed by Calfee (2009) for this future edition of the *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension* include adding discussions on “the treatment of discourse, including variations in language

registers (natural vs. academic language), the contrast between narrative and expository texts, and the interplay of comprehension and composition” (p. xiv). In closing, it should be noted that the editors and contributors of this book are donating a portion of the royalties from this book to a scholarship fund set up in memory of Michael Pressley at the University of Notre Dame and at Michigan State University.

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About the Reviewer

Christine Wiggins is a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Utah. Christine is a former Texas elementary school teacher who has received T.T.A.S. evaluations of “Clearly Outstanding” during her years of teaching in Texas. Her teaching experiences at the university level has included undergraduate and graduate courses in Foundations of Reading, Principles of Literacy, Elementary Reading

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