



# Friday Focus

## Carter County Schools

### Text Complexity



According to *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* (Fisher, Frey, and Lapp), text complexity can be defined as three interrelated components. The Qualitative dimension of text complexity refers to those aspects only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands.

The Quantitative dimension of text complexity refers to those aspects such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software.

Reader and Task Considerations refer to variables that are specific to particular readers like motivation, knowledge, and experiences, and to the particular tasks such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed.

There is no exact science for determining text complexity. Teachers must learn to use their professional judgment to consider all of these aspects of the text. There are some tools that will help us as we examine texts. For example, Lexiles, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Formula and the Fountas and Pinnell Levels all offer support in determining text complexity.

### The Key to Success

Our fifth installment from Todd Whitaker's *What Great Teachers Do Differently* identifies the most important variable in an effective classroom. On first thought many people might say it's the group of students they get that determines their effectiveness. Some may feel that the AP/Honors teacher has an advantage over the teacher whose classes include students who are low-performing, disabled, or from low- socio-economic backgrounds. However, Todd Whitaker says the main variable in any classroom is *not* the students, **it is the teacher**. You can have a classroom full of honors students; however, the instruction of the teacher determines the results in the classroom.

Whitaker says when students perform poorly, the effective teacher blames him/herself and the ineffective teacher blames the kids, parents, previous teachers, or administration. The effective teacher accepts responsibility for his/her classroom and the ineffective teacher does not. The effective teacher rises to the challenge to make his/her classroom the best.

Whitaker says, "...everyone's effectiveness depends at least in part on what they expect of themselves, not of others." We do not get to select what students are in our classroom, and parents send us the very best they have. So, let's all assume responsibility for teaching and ensuring learning for the children in Carter County. If we all understand that we as educators are the variable that will determine the level of success for our children, this positive thinking will eventually be passed on to students. Whitaker says, "Success in any profession starts with a focus on self. After all, we are the one variable that we can most easily and most productively influence." Reaching the Standard of Excellence in Carter County is a viable and attainable goal and our children deserve it.

#### Choosing "Just Right" Books

According to *Strategies that Work*, students should be selecting books that are "just right" for them in order to achieve optimal growth in reading. These books do not frustrate readers, rather they are challenged by reading them.

**"If we only eat ice cream, we won't get healthy; and if we only read easy books, we won't get better at reading."**



In an article by Bill Goldsmith, The Developmental Study Center, a research-based, non-profit educational publisher in operation since 1980, offers these helpful questions for students to ask themselves when choosing "just right" books.

1. Can I read all or most of the words?

If students are to comprehend any given text, they should be reading approximately 94% of the words correctly.

2. Do I sound smooth while reading?

When students are reading word-by-word and their fluency is choppy, they tend to view reading as an arduous task and could become more reluctant readers.

3. Do I understand what I am reading?

Comprehension occurs when a student understands what they read.

Just as Goldilocks had to find that "just right" chair to feel at home, our students need to be taught how to find that "just right" book in order to feel successful in our classrooms.

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#### Reading Strategy of the Month

##### QUESTIONING

This is the strategy that moves readers forward. Successful readers ask questions when they read. Teachers should ask questions before, during, and after reading.