

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY: INTEGRATING READING, WRITING, AND LEARNING IN INTERVENTION SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – Our purpose in this chapter is to argue for the importance of integrating reading and writing in classrooms and to provide examples of what integration of this nature looks like in classrooms across content areas and grade levels.

Design/methodology/approach – In this chapter we provide an overview of the argument for reading–writing integration, highlight four common tools (skill decomposition, skill decontextualization, scaffolding, and authenticity) that teachers use to cope with complexity in literacy classrooms, and describe four classrooms in which teachers strive to integrate reading and writing in support of learning.

Findings – We provide detailed examples and analyses of what the integration of reading and writing in the service of learning looks like in

four different classroom contexts and focus particularly on how the four teachers use scaffolding and authenticity to cope with complexity and support their students' literacy learning.

Research limitations/implications – We intentionally highlight four noteworthy approaches to literacy instruction, but our examples are relevant to specific contexts and are not meant to encompass the range of promising practices in which teachers and students engage on a daily basis.

Practical implications – In this chapter we provide classroom teachers with four concrete tools for coping with the complexities of literacy instruction in classroom settings and highlight what instruction of this nature – with an emphasis on scaffolding and authenticity – looks like in four different classroom contexts.

Originality/value of chapter – Teachers and other educational stakeholders must acknowledge and embrace the complexities of learning to read and write, so that students have opportunities to engage in rich and authentic literacy practices in their classrooms.

Keywords: Reading; writing; learning; literacy; instruction; intervention

Classrooms are complex spaces, and literacy intervention classrooms are no exception. By definition, they are populated by students who struggle with literacy on some level, but the students in this category are by no means homogeneous, nor are the teachers who serve them. A given student may be years behind her peers in reading and/or writing, or she may read and write at relatively high levels but fail to perform well on the standardized tests that determine placement in such classes. She may decode fluently but understand little of what she reads, struggle with simple sight words yet comprehend at amazingly high levels, or speak a first language that is not understood or acknowledged by the school. She might exhibit attitudes that range from gratitude for the opportunity to inhabit a space in which she can relax and do her best work, to anxiety about the potentially critical opinions of her higher-achieving peers, to frustration or anger in response to one more piece of evidence that she doesn't quite measure up – and potentially every emotion in between. An intervention teacher, on his part, may view his students as exhibiting inherent deficits, as needing intense personal support, as victims of an educational system that serves to reproduce

struggling readers, and/or as possessing special skills and particular bodies of knowledge that have not yet been tapped in the classroom or school context.

The goings-on within the intervention classroom are equally complex. Curriculum may focus on teaching skills in isolation, emphasize strategic approaches to text, adopt a reader-response view, or incorporate a combination of these approaches. The curriculum may be delivered to a large group, through small group work, or in a fully individualized workshop format, and these grouping patterns may vary from day to day and even moment to moment. Reading material may include content-area textbooks, scripted reading programs, children's literature, popular magazines, electronic texts, and/or a variety of other reading options.

A typical, even natural, way to respond to this sometimes-overwhelming complexity – especially in the context of literacy intervention classrooms, where instruction focuses specifically on building skills that students appear to lack – is to try to simplify it. In the pursuit of simplification, however, reading and writing too often become a series of isolated skills that are taught individually, delivered on a kind of instructional assembly line, and disconnected from genuinely literate activity. Of course, attempting to simplify these processes in the classroom does not make them any less complex in reality. Simplification merely ignores the inherent complexity of literacy for a little while. In this chapter, therefore, we argue that reading and writing – especially, but certainly not limited to, reading and writing that occur in intervention settings – should be taught as the complex social and cognitive processes that they are and that one way to manage the inherent complexity of the classroom space is to teach them together in the service of larger learning goals. As [Roehler \(1992\)](#) reminded us over 20 years ago, thoughtful instruction must “embrace” complexity, and it is our intent in this chapter to take Roehler's advice seriously as we outline what thoughtful instruction of this nature looks like in different classroom contexts and across grade levels. It's time that all learners, including students in intervention settings, are offered a curriculum that embraces the complexities inherent in learning how to read and write.

THE CASE FOR READING–WRITING INTEGRATION

At the most fundamental level, both reading and writing are tools that individuals use to make sense of their worlds. Nearly three decades ago, Tierney and Pearson (1983) argued that reading and writing are both acts of

composing. As composing acts, they involve five characteristics: planning (setting goals and mobilizing knowledge); drafting (refining meaning); aligning (assuming stances and roles toward the text); revising (examining and reworking interpretations); and monitoring (distancing oneself from and evaluating the text). Since reading and writing are so complementary, it makes sense to teach them together, but the affordances of an integrated approach to reading and writing instruction extend beyond practical considerations.

Indeed, an integrated approach to instruction benefits both reading and writing achievement. In an extensive review of studies that looked at the reading–writing relationship through a variety of methodological lenses (e.g., performance-based correlational studies, process-based correlational studies, and experimental/instructional studies), Tierney and Shanahan (1996) found converging evidence in the research literature that reading and writing, when taught together, mutually benefit each other. Moreover, they argued that “combined reading and writing engenders a more inquisitive attitude to learning and...facilitates the expansion and refinement of knowledge” (p. 265).

It makes sense that integrating reading and writing in the classroom is beneficial to students, and there are at least three reasons (but arguably many more) why combining them instructionally enhances student learning (Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Pearson, 1994). First, when you use writing in a reading intervention, you create another purpose for reading. For example, rather than asking students to read for the sake of reading, instructors might ask students to use their readings as sources for their writing. Framed in this way, reading provides students with the “knowledge fuel” they need for writing. Second, writing in a reading intervention provides students with an opportunity to reflect on, synthesize, and come to a deeper understanding of what they read and know – or think they know. For example, instructors might ask students to use writing to reflect on any issues that arise for them as they read. Conversely, they might ask students to write about something before they read, as a way to “mobilize [their] knowledge in anticipation of reading” (Pearson, 1994, p. 22). Third, reading provides students with the opportunity to think about the decisions they as authors make in order to appeal to their readers in specific ways. This helps students to learn to read critically and with an eye for how the structure of a text influences the way(s) that they read it – to “read like a writer,” to use Frank Smith’s (1983) metaphor for close rereading of this sort. It is clear that reading and writing mutually benefit each other and, when taught together, have important

implications for student learning. Perhaps what is not so clear is how to integrate reading and writing in ways that take into account the needs of teachers and students in the context of inherently complex classroom spaces. In the next section, therefore, we draw attention to several different ways of managing complexity.

COPING WITH COMPLEXITY

Learning to read and to write are complex undertakings. Both require learners to orchestrate a wide range of knowledge, highly automated skills, highly intentional strategies, and contextual constraints in order to construct meaning for the purposes of communication. Drawing on a prior synthesis of best practices in schooling and existing research on managing complex learning (see [Monda-Amaya & Pearson, 1996](#)), we highlight four common tools that teachers use to assist their students as they learn to read and write in school: skill decomposition, skill decontextualization, scaffolding, and authenticity.

Skill Decomposition

Skill decomposition is familiar to anyone who has ever taken a lesson in tennis or golf, or learned how to drive a stick-shift car. The logic is to break down a complex, usually multistage performance into its component parts, teach each part to some level of mastery, and, after each part has been mastered, to reassemble them into a comprehensive routine. Controversies associated with skill decomposition underlie many traditional and current curricular tensions, notably the tension over whether phonics, comprehension strategies, and grammar need to be taught directly and explicitly, by addressing the process in bits and pieces. In a sense, the controversy is best captured through the question: “Must we teach what must be learned?” On the one side are those who argue that children may not learn what they are not taught directly, explicitly, and intentionally ([Gersten & Carnine, 1986](#); [Rosenshine & Stevens, 1984](#)). On the other side of the argument are those who suggest that while it is appropriate, perhaps essential, that students acquire specific skills, those skills are best acquired incidentally while students are engaged in the process of reading and writing ([Stephens, 1991](#)). The danger of decomposition is that the breakdown of the curriculum often impedes students’ understanding of literacy as a *process* and, instead,

encourages a view of literacy as a set of separate tools or building blocks to be picked up in an assembly-line fashion (see Guthrie, 1973), with the acquisition of later skills completely dependent on mastery of earlier ones.

Skill Decontextualization

In order to strip away potentially confusing and irrelevant features of the instructional context, teachers often provide specific subskill instruction out of the context of real reading, writing, and thinking situations. So one might, for example, teach students how to write main idea paragraphs using snippets of text that have been intentionally constructed to illustrate the canonical $MI \rightarrow D_1 + D_2 + D_3$ (a main idea followed by three details) motif. The logic behind skill decontextualization is similar to the logic underlying decomposition: in both cases, the motivation is to make a phenomenon appear simpler than it really is by stripping away its natural complexity. The dark side of decontextualization is its potential to obscure the relationship between a skill as it is taught in an instructional context and the skill as it must be used in everyday literacy events, either in or outside of school.

Decodable text for young readers is one example of the decontextualization approach. The logic is to provide novice readers with texts comprising words that follow simple symbol-sound patterns but are devoid of the contextual fabric that would allow a reader to infer the meaning of a word from the immediately surrounding context. Thus, sentences like “Dan can fan the van with Nan” are considered to be acceptable in early reading materials even though they represent sequences of ideas one would never encounter in an authentic story.¹ In our view, the price we pay for this sort of decontextualization is too dear, for it has the potential to allow students to infer that reading doesn’t have to make sense (Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

Scaffolding

Scaffolding provides an alternative to decomposition and decontextualization as a way of managing complexity. The scaffolding metaphor, introduced to us by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) and endemic to socially based views of literacy (e.g., Moll et al., 1990; Vygotsky, 1978), is appealing for those who want to carve out a helpful, but not necessarily a controlling, role for teachers. Just like the scaffolding used in building, instructional

scaffolds provide *support* and are both *temporary* and *adjustable*. So, instead of breaking down a process like reading into subcomponents, a teacher can provide the social and instructional support needed to allow a student to engage in a complex task that she might not otherwise be able to manage on her own. Other useful metaphors for understanding the role of scaffolding are water wings for swimming and training wheels for two-wheeled bicycles. In both instances, the scaffolds allow a learner to engage in the real, authentic activity of swimming or riding a bike before she has acquired all of the component skills that would truly allow her to do either on her own. Scaffolds for reading and writing do the same thing – they allow students to engage in authentic processes before they have achieved independent mastery of them.

Scaffolding helps teachers to work with students in what Vygotsky (1978) labeled the “zone of proximal development” – the instructional region just beyond a student’s grasp. Scaffolding allows students to use a strategy or engage in a process while they gradually gain control of it. With analogies, explicit cues, metaphors, elaborations, and modeling, teachers can create a form of assistance that allows students to participate in authentic reading and writing in a kind of apprenticeship role. Scaffolding promotes learning and self-control as long as it is gradually removed as students assume responsibility for the task or process.

Authenticity

On first examination, it might seem contradictory to view authenticity as a tool for managing complexity; after all, isn’t authenticity a major *source* of complexity? Doesn’t the authenticity of everyday life, even in classrooms, present tasks and processes in all of their glorious and vexing complexity? How can it also be a means of managing this complexity? The answer to these questions has everything to do with context and purpose. That is, while we might argue that it is appropriate, perhaps essential, that students acquire specific skills, we also argue that those skills are best acquired incidentally while students are engaged in the process of authentic reading and writing. In other words, if we let students engage in genuine acts of communication – in real contexts, for real purposes, with real people – students will have a genuine reason for acquiring lower-level skills such as decoding and grammar conventions because those skills are a means to achieving their communication goals. They will want others to be able to read their poems, for example, so they will learn and use conventional

spellings. Unknown words will stand in the way of the information or insight they want to get from a book, so they will have a pressing reason for honing their skills for reading and inferring the meanings of words in context. In short, the quest for communicative competence will provide incentives to master a repertoire of skills, strategies, and knowledge.

Orchestrating the Complexity Toolkit

In an ideal scenario, scaffolding and authenticity work hand in glove, and, at the appropriate times, they might be supported by some amount of skill decomposition and/or decontextualization. For example, a teacher might cope with complexity by using scaffolding in the context of authentic learning tasks. He might even decompose or decontextualize a task at times in order to highlight some feature of the task or context, but these moments would be fleeting and clearly embedded within the larger instructional framework. The operative principle for coping with complexity, from Pearson (1994), is this:

Instruction for skills and strategies should begin and end in authentic learning contexts – contexts in which the skill or strategy helps the reader achieve personal goals, such as understanding the story at hand or figuring out the pronunciation of the word he or she is currently puzzling over. Decontextualized instruction, if offered at all, should be limited to instances in which the teacher wishes temporarily to highlight some important feature of the skill or strategy and be followed immediately by a recontextualized application. (p. 28)

Implicit in our argument is an ideal – that it is possible, even desirable, to use all four of these complexity management tools (skill decomposition, skill decontextualization, scaffolding, and authenticity) in concert to address the needs of the range of learners in our classrooms. And we know that successful teachers manage to orchestrate these tools quite deftly. But, in our experience, the tools are used in very different ways and with different emphases depending on the skill profiles that the students bring to the classroom. Though we believe that scaffolding and authenticity (with the option to selectively embed moments of skill decomposition and decontextualization) are the richest approaches to the management of complexity, students who struggle to learn in our classrooms are much more likely to receive a purely decontextualized and decomposed instructional approach. Why is this the case? Why do we feel compelled to break down reading and writing processes for struggling learners? Why do we think it is better to strip the learning environment of its natural contextual complexity? We

believe it is an intuitive “faith” in the “keep it simple” principle: if a student struggles with a three-step process, give her one step at a time and make sure that each step is mastered before going on to the next step. But when and how do students get a chance to integrate those steps so that they can perform the entire routine?

In the section that follows, we present four vignettes that illustrate how some teachers manage to successfully orchestrate the complexity of reading and writing in very different classroom contexts by drawing from a repertoire comprised of the four tools introduced above. We offer them as evidence that all learners can benefit from instruction that integrates reading and writing and utilizes a range of complexity management tools.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING IN THE CLASSROOM

Writing in a Reading Intervention: Another Purpose for Reading

Ethan,² a nine-year-old Latino student with an intense interest in the natural world, works diligently to record notes from several texts about sharks. Reading is a challenge for him, struggling as he does with even simple sight words. But he is deeply motivated to learn more about this animal as he prepares to write and illustrate his own book on the topic. In his classroom he is typically distracted by anything of interest going on around him and he willingly plays the clown at every opportunity. But in this Study Circle setting, Ethan is a different child. He chooses to sit alone so he can focus on his work, he reads and rereads passages to make sure he fully understands them, and after an extended period of solitary study, he is delighted to share bits of what he has learned with his peers.

As part of a yearlong intervention, a small group of 4th grade students who struggled with various aspects of reading and writing participated in Study Circle. The goals of Study Circle were to develop a culture of inquiry and to integrate prior knowledge, reading, and writing. The group’s first task was to discuss what it meant to “study” something and then generate potential topics. The students’ top choices were animals, insects, nature, money, and space, and, in the end, animals received the most votes. At this point, the children made a list of all the animals they could think of, and each selected one to research. Next, they made a list of everything they already knew about their chosen animals and then asked each other for additional information. In the meantime, Elizabeth Jaeger, the students’

teacher and the second author of this chapter, was hitting many of the local libraries searching for books about these animals that were close enough to their reading levels to prove useful.

To begin, Elizabeth asked the children what kind of information they thought they would uncover about their animals and, together, they decided on the following questions: Where do they live? What do they eat? What is their body like? What is known about their babies? What other interesting information can I find? Elizabeth read aloud a book on pandas and the children helped her recognize what facts to record. They practiced deleting all unnecessary words so that notes were as short as possible and they were less likely to copy directly from the books they consulted, a practice common among children at this age (Dreher, 1995). Once the children were relatively comfortable with this process, they worked independently (with Elizabeth's support) to take notes from at least two books, one website, and, in some cases, a video. They talked a lot as they worked, sharing interesting tidbits with each other, and the group stopped occasionally to give more formal updates.

Elizabeth met with each student and went through her/his draft, revising as needed. Finally, the students drew lines in the text to show Elizabeth where the ends of pages were and whether or not they wanted an illustration on any given page. Elizabeth sewed bound books for them and typed and glued in the text. The students drew pictures and put them into their books as well.

This was a complex process. The children were balancing choice-making, goal-setting, reading for information, note-taking, crafting a text that was interesting for other children, and illustrating that text in ways that enhanced its accessibility. Rather than decomposing and decontextualizing these skills (e.g., "Today we will all take notes from a shared text by paraphrasing each sentence."), a process of modeling was used to scaffold the children's experience and the final product was authentic and meaningful to them. This inquiry project went a long way in building a sense of camaraderie in the group and positioned the students as knowledgeable and committed scholars who employed reading strategies to write about topics of interest to them.

Writing in a Reading Intervention: An Opportunity to Reflect on Reading

On a Tuesday afternoon in mid May, ten students read quietly at their desks. It is the beginning of the sixth and last period of the day in Mark Taylor's³

reading classroom. Mark's reading class is a required intervention class for ninth graders who are referred by their teachers and counselors based on low grades and/or low state standards test scores. Like most days, today's agenda includes a writing assignment in addition to the reading activities.

After almost 25 minutes of silent, independent reading – the way that Mark begins every class – the students turn their attention to the current group reading text, *Emako Blue*. Before they begin reading together, Mark tells them:

We are going to leave the end of the time for a written reflection for this book. Basically you're going to write about what you think about this book so far. Do you like it, do you hate it, do you have any questions, do you have any predictions? We're going to leave the last ten minutes or so to do that, so while we're reading I want you to think about what you want to write about.

On the board next to the day's agenda is a series of possible sentence starters:

I predict that...I think this will happen because...

I wonder why...

__ reminds me of __ because __.

I like/love/hate this book because __.

I hope that...

My favorite character/scene is __ because __.

I don't like __ because __.

Mark encourages the students to refer to these prompts as the class reads together and as the students think about what they want to write in their written reflections.

Mark's class is, by definition, a reading class, but this day's agenda is reflective of his yearlong efforts to integrate writing into the curriculum as a way for his students to think about their reading and demonstrate what they've learned from it. These daily writing activities range from short, five-minute "quick writes" on post-it notes to extended written reflections that often take the form of letters (e.g., a letter to a character, a letter from a character to someone else, a letter to Mark or a classmate about a book that the student has read), and they all operate in the service of reading.

Mark's daily writing activities also provide him with a way to scaffold his students' interactions with text. By introducing sentence starters prior to reading, as he does during the class period described above, Mark provides the students with a framework for reading. At the same time, these sentence starters also assist students with the writing process by giving them a point

of access for their writing. In addition, Mark chooses his group reading texts with an eye toward authenticity. *Emako Blue* (Woods, 2004), for example, is the story of a talented young singer whose aspirations are complicated by the realities of living in South Central Los Angeles. The themes the novel addresses – high school, friendship, jealousy, relationships, teen violence, etc. – are ones that the students in Mark’s class grapple with every day, and the affective nature of the writing prompts further encourages the students to make connections between the text and their own lives and perspectives. Because reading and writing always occur in the context of high-interest texts and related activities, Mark rarely relies on decomposition and decontextualization in his classroom.

Though Mark consciously integrates writing into the reading curriculum on a daily basis, he wishes that writing could play a more central role in the class. He “would like a [ninety-minute] block where we could do more writing and have a chance to keep up a writing journal...[but] to do it well it takes up a lot of time and it needs to be routine, and...then it misses out on something else.” Mark believes in writing as a way to enhance his students’ reading experiences, and he demonstrates this commitment to writing on a daily basis despite its challenges.

*Reading in a Writing Intervention: An Opportunity to Think about
Authors’ Decisions*

Just after lunch, the children in Lea’s⁴ third grade classroom – populated predominantly by children who struggle with reading and writing – settle in for Writer’s Workshop. For approximately six weeks, Rodrigo, Sam, and Paul have worked diligently to coauthor a story called “The Hero’s” [sic] about a group of boys who turn into superheroes whenever evil threatens. On this day, Paul is at the easel scribing the next chapter in the story, with Sam at his side reading along and making suggestions. Soon Rodrigo sidles up to them, reads the segment of text that Paul and Sam have generated, and requests a turn with the pen. The three boys continue this back and forth throughout the hour devoted to writing.

Over the course of a year-long research project, Elizabeth observed and participated in a range of experiences and activities where she saw reading and writing used as tools to enhance all sorts of learning. This particular collaboration proved quite instructive in allowing her to learn more about the benefits and limits of coconstruction. While the boys allowed each other a great deal of latitude to “generate candidate text” (Heap, 1989, p. 275), they

regularly read and reread what their friends had written and this process served to solidify their work as authors. The cocomposers discussed the finer elements of the plot and called each other out when they felt a new segment of text didn't make sense. This reading most often occurred at a change of authorship, serving to reunite the team, some members of which were off doing other things during times when they themselves were not scribing. On other occasions, the rereading was undertaken in service of correcting mechanical errors. Rodrigo noted that he intended to do some rewriting on a small piece of paper (the boys typically worked on chart paper) because "some of our page doesn't make...sence [sic] I'm making corrections."

Part way through the writing of this story, the boys read the text aloud to other members of the class. The other students were very enthusiastic. Additional children wished to join in as coauthors but did so without reading what had come before. Miguel, for example, failed to read all parts of the story which were completed before he joined the group. As a result, the section he composed seemed out of sync with previous chapters and confused the other writers. Clearly, the process of rereading was key to the coherent development of this story and to the boys' progress as writers.

In Lea's classroom, decomposition and decontextualization of writing skills rarely occurred. She didn't even believe in the traditional Writer's Workshop mini-lesson, preferring instead to circulate as the children worked, addressing their writing needs as they occurred within the context of the work at hand. This served as a scaffold for the children, as did the process of collaboration that occurred as children composed in small groups; particular children excelled in (and were challenged by) particular areas of writing and they supported each other along the way. The children had complete control over the content of their writing, as well as the process of generating that writing, making for a fully authentic activity.

Reading and Writing to Support Learning in History

It was Monday and the students in Sara Ballute's tenth grade Social Studies class were preparing to read/view and take notes on a collection of pieces (23 in all!) where they would find and record benefits and disadvantages of the Industrial Revolution. Sara began the class by demonstrating on the board how to write Cornell Notes. Then she asked students to work with a neighbor to produce more notes of their own on the same passage. Another student continued reading a new passage, with Sara directing students to, "Think about what you hear that's good or that could be a problem." Again, Sara

modeled the process and then gave students several minutes to add to their own notes. For the next passage, Sara instructed the students to read silently, write notes, and then share their thoughts with a neighbor. Several students then shared their opinions on the costs and benefits with the whole class.

Sara Ballute teaches tenth grade World History at the High School for Service and Learning in Brooklyn to a population that includes about 20% Caribbean English Language Learners (mostly Haitian immigrants) and 20% Learning Disability classified students. As a part of her participation with a cadre of teachers from the New Visions Schools (located across all five NYC boroughs), she has developed and taught integrated modules designed to prepare students to meet the Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts in the discipline of History (Urbani, Pearson, Ballute, & Lent, 2012). The Literacy Design Collaborative worked with the teachers to implement a highly flexible framework for module development with the explicit goal of ensuring that teachers from the disciplines of history, science, and literature embed reading and writing tasks and pedagogy into their content-focused modules. One of the modules that Sara developed with fellow teacher Timothy Lent, on the Industrial Revolution, illustrates many of the reading–writing integration ideas that we have unpacked in this chapter.

Sara and Tim created a 4-week module that engaged students in reading, viewing, and listening to a wide range of “texts” that depicted many of the social, economic, and cultural issues and events of the Industrial Revolution, almost always framed as “benefits” (inventions that made life better, increased productivity, and connected the country) versus “costs” (child labor, urban poverty, loss of connection to the land).

As students encountered these various texts, they took notes, summarized paragraphs and articles, paraphrased key ideas, evaluated arguments and evidence, held debates to test their ability to form their own arguments, practiced writing lead sentences and supportive sentences, and practiced writing arguments about a familiar issue (fast food vs. health food). All this in the name of amassing evidence relevant to the eventual argument they would make on the culminating task that asked them to respond to the question: Were the achievements and growth of the Industrial Revolution Era worth the cost to society?

Sara’s instruction depicted in the vignette is an excellent example of scaffolding within a task, and within a single lesson. She moved from teacher modeling to small group work and finally individual work, a classic example of the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) at work. She then reversed the process, encouraging

students to share their thoughts again with a small group of their peers and then the whole class. Sara used a range of scaffolding techniques, most driven by this principle: If you introduce a new process, do it through familiar content, and, if you introduce new content, do it through a familiar process. So when she led the students through the steps in the writing process (the last week of the module), she introduced all of the key steps within the fast food/health food topic before she asked them to apply those steps to the Industrial Revolution argumentative task. The mini-task was another scaffolding tool for Sara. She organized most of the response to reading activities as mini-tasks – in which she first modeled and then asked for students to apply a skill like paraphrasing or summarizing to new content introduced in the readings for the day. She adapted, regrouped, and reframed tasks on the fly just as soon as she received an indication that her original explanation or framing did not make the task transparent for the students. It was responsive teaching at its best.

In the final analysis, performance on the culminating essays varied; some were better than others. However, most students “got” the idea that you use textual evidence to support arguments, they learned how to take relevant notes on texts presented in different media, and they got better at the steps in the writing process over time. All of this was completed in the context of a doubly integrated module: (a) the module required students to use reading–writing–speaking–listening practices in close proximity to, and in concert with, one another, and (b) the entire language arts complex was woven into an important practice in the discipline of history – taking and supporting a position on an historically problematic question.

CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter, we have argued that the way to best cope with complexity in the classroom is by integrating reading and writing to support learning through the orchestration of four teaching and learning tools: scaffolding, authenticity, and, when used wisely and sparingly, skill decomposition and skill decontextualization. The four vignettes serve as examples of some of the ways that practicing teachers have integrated reading and writing in their classrooms in an effort to maintain complexity in intervention settings. From these vignettes, we have identified a series of practical considerations for teachers who wish to embrace and take full advantage of the rich and generative complexities of reading, writing, and learning in the classroom.

First, we recommend that teachers develop and implement a rich portfolio of scaffolds to enable their students to accomplish complex reading and writing tasks. The teachers in our vignettes used various combinations of modeling, questioning, and prompting strategies in the context of whole-class demonstrations, one-on-one consultations, and small group collaborations in order to provide multiple points of access for their students without sacrificing complexity.

Second, we recommend that teachers ground literacy skills instruction in authentic reading and writing tasks. Elizabeth met this challenge in her Study Circle by providing fourth-grade students like Ethan with the opportunity to research and write books about animals that interested them. Mark used writing to encourage his ninth graders to make connections between the themes of their group reading text, *Emako Blue*, and their own perspectives and experiences. And Lea provided her third graders with the time and space to construct and coconstruct stories of their own design.

Third, we recommend that teachers across content areas – including literature, science, history, and math – integrate reading and writing into the curriculum of their subject-matter disciplines (see Pearson, Cervetti, & Tilson, 2008). Sara’s integration of reading and writing in her tenth-grade world history classroom is one example of what this type of integration might look like. She was able to provide her students with the tools they required to take a position and make an argument related to an important historical question.

Classrooms are complex spaces, and intervention classrooms are even more complex because of the range of skills, needs, and motivations students present. Even so, we encourage teachers across grade levels and content areas to resist the appeal of approaches to reading, writing, and learning that emphasize simplifying curriculum for struggling readers. Instead, we hope that teachers and students will work together to embrace the challenges and complexities of approaches that emphasize the synergies between reading, writing, and learning practices while helping students as they are trying to acquire knowledge and insight in science, social studies, math, and literature classes.

NOTES

1. One might argue that Brian Wildsmith’s (1987) *Cat on a Mat* or Dr. Seuss’s (1963) *Hop on Pop* are counter examples to our claim that decodable texts are not authentic. It is true that both Wildsmith and Seuss use rhyming patterns as a clever

motif to engage the reader, but both use it for stylistic literary purposes rather than to make words easily decodable. There is a story told through words and pictures in *Cat on a Mat* and *Hop on Pop*, but this is not so with a sentence like “Dan can fan the van with Nan.”

2. The child’s name in this vignette is a pseudonym.
3. The teacher’s name in this vignette is a pseudonym.
4. Other than Elizabeth’s, all names in this vignette are pseudonyms.

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