P. David Pearson

P. David Pearson, PhD, is a faculty member in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program in the Graduate School of Education at University of California, Berkeley, where he also served as dean from 2001–2009. His current research focuses on issues of reading instruction and reading assessment policies and practices. Pearson has served as editor of Reading Research Quarterly and the National Reading Conference Yearbook, as president of the National Reading Conference, as a member of the International Reading Association board of directors, and as the founding editor of the Handbook of Reading Research. He is currently on the board of directors for the National Writing Project and a member of the National Academy of Education. He has received the IRA’s William S. Gray Citation of Merit and Albert Harris Award, NRC’s Oscar Causey Award, NCTE’s Alan Purves Award, the University of Minnesota’s Outstanding Alumni Award, and AERA’s Distinguished Contributions to Research in Education Award. Before coming to UC Berkeley, Pearson served on the reading education faculties at Minnesota, Illinois, and Michigan State. He began his education career as a fifth-grade teacher in Porterville, CA.

James V. Hoffman

James V. Hoffman, PhD, is a professor of Language and Literacy Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to his graduate teaching responsibilities, he directs the undergraduate teacher education program in the area of reading. His research interests focus on reading acquisition, reading instruction, reading texts, and teacher education. He is the author of more than one hundred scholarly articles, chapters, monographs, and books. He is a former editor of Reading Research Quarterly and the National Reading Conference Yearbook and former director of the Research in Teacher Education program at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas. Hoffman is a past president of the National Reading Conference. He served on the board of directors of the International Reading Association and as director of the IRA Commission on Excellence in the preparation of preservice teachers in the area of reading. He was elected to the Reading Hall of Fame and just completed a term as president of this organization. He has been active in numerous literacy projects in the developing world. He has worked with International Reading Association’s international division on projects in Belize, Thailand, Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa.

In this chapter, Pearson and Hoffman present two sets of principles of practice: ten for teaching in general and ten for teaching reading in particular.

©2011 Solution Tree. All rights reserved. solution-tree.com
May not be posted online, emailed, or otherwise shared electronically.
Chapter 1

Principles of Practice for the Teaching of Reading

P. David Pearson and James V. Hoffman

Attorneys practice law. Physicians practice medicine. Teachers, however, practice to get ready to teach. Teachers are more like hockey players in the way they practice than they are like attorneys, doctors, and other major service professionals. This positioning of teaching as technical and not professional arises as much from a self-imposed view found in the discourse that surrounds teaching as it does from comments made by those outside of education. Educators typically speak of teaching practices (even best practices) as tied to teaching behaviors and not to the kinds of thought processes, dispositions, and passions that research has demonstrated as critical to effective teaching. Whether the omission of these professional dimensions of teaching practices is intentional or not, the consequences are the same: teaching is “doing,” and effective teaching is reduced to “doing the right thing.” Nothing, we believe, could be further from the truth.

Our goal in writing this chapter is to elevate the notion of practice in teaching to the status of other service professions. We will argue for a concept of professional practice in teaching as a context for simultaneously acting, serving, and learning, and for a conception of professional practice that is grounded in a philosophy of pragmatism that gives shape to a personal practical theory of teaching. We will further argue for a conception of the teaching of
reading that promotes synergy between the practice of teaching and the practice of literacy.

We present two sets of principles of practice: ten for teaching in general and ten for teaching reading in particular. These principles are the product of our own experiences as classroom teachers and literacy educators. They reflect the intersection of our own personal practical theories. We hope that they provoke conversations around the practical teaching of literacy, help reframe the ways in which teachers approach (examine and reflect upon) their own practice, and become part of the larger discourse surrounding teaching and literacy practices.

Our Pragmatic Roots

According to Kurt Lewin (1951), “There is nothing as practical as a good theory” (p. 169). This widely quoted assertion is open to interpretation. Perhaps he is suggesting that practice should be guided by theory. Perhaps he is suggesting that theory should be guided by practice. Or perhaps, as we believe, he means that every action is guided by theory, whether the actor is aware of it or not. An examination of Lewin’s academic career as a gestalt theorist, a pioneer in the field of social psychology, and as the initiator of the action-research movement suggests that he would champion all three interpretations. Lewin was a pragmatist and believed that to truly understand something you needed to examine it in the context of change, and like most of his contemporary pragmatists, he abided by the principle that if you truly want to understand something, try to change it.

Pragmatism, as a philosophical movement, arose in the late nineteenth century and is best represented in the writing of William James (1907/1979) and Charles Pierce (see Turisi, 1997). The essence

---

1 In pragmatism, we find alignment with other important movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Darwinism, Marxism, and the scientific method. Indeed, the marginalized view of learning and development as represented in the work of Vygotsky and Piaget is aligned with the view that experience is tested and constructed (really transformed) into knowledge within the individual (with a heavy dose of social mediation).
of pragmatism is found in the argument that the truth of a proposition (or action) can only be discovered in the examination of the consequences. A theory of practice is constructed around problems experienced in a particular context. In pragmatism, we find truth by attending to the practical consequences of ideas. We construct truth in the process of successful living in the world: truth is in no sense absolute. Beliefs are considered to be true if and only if they are useful and can be practically applied. The truth may change as contexts change (as they always will), but the path leading to the discovery of the truth is always the same. The pragmatist proceeds from the basic premise that the human capability of theorizing is integral to intelligent practice. Theory and practice are not separate spheres; rather, theories are tools or maps for finding our way around and engaging with the world or for understanding the pathways we have followed—intentional or not—in traversing that world.

For the pragmatist, learning is practical in the sense that it grows out of and is tested through experience. John Dewey was one of the leading figures in applying the philosophy of pragmatism to education (see Hickman & Alexander, 1998). For Dewey, the philosophy of pragmatism formed the crucial link between his interests in truth, democracy, and education. For Dewey, there was no question of theory versus practice, but rather a question of intelligent practice versus uninformed, stupid practice. For Dewey, pragmatism provided the guiding framework for a personal life and a social order. Pragmatism is much more than “whatever works” or “anything goes” or “be practical”; in fact, it really is none of those. Pragmatism is an approach to understanding experience—critically and methodically analyzed—unfettered by ideologies and driven by examining the good, the right, the just, and even the beautiful that follow from our actions, including the words we speak.

**Personal Practical Theories**

In the Third Handbook of Research in Teaching, Lee Shulman (1986) described teacher knowledge as the missing paradigm in
research in teaching. Of course there had been earlier research focused on teacher thinking (such as Clark & Yinger, 1977), but Shulman’s chapter seemed to be a watershed moment for a shift in focus for research in teaching away from teacher behaviors toward teacher thinking. While much of the research that responded to Shulman’s challenge focused on the identification of different types of teacher knowledge (such as teacher pedagogical knowledge), a powerful line of research emerged that examined the nature of and important role of the practical knowledge that reflects and guides teachers. Elbaz (1981) proposed the term practical knowledge as the key to understanding teacher thought processes. He defined five sources of teachers’ practical knowledge: situational, personal, social, experiential, and theoretical. Clandinin (1985) and Connelly and Clandinin (1984; 1985) extended this work by offering the framework of personal practical knowledge. They described this knowledge as personal in the sense that it grows out of circumstances, actions, and undergoings that have affective meaning for the individual. This personal practical knowledge includes a body of convictions that may be conscious or unconscious. While there was some early criticism of this construct for the extreme focus on the individual and not the social and institutional forces that might give shape to this knowledge, this line of research has continued to evolve. Most of this research continues to reveal the important role that narratives, images, and metaphor play in shaping the construction of this knowledge. A highly reflective process known as personal theorizing (Cornett, Yeotis, & Terwilliger, 1990) allows teachers to identify and make explicit their personal practical knowledge by transforming it into personal practical theories (for a discussion of this process as it relates to thoughtfully adaptive teachers, see Fairbanks et al., 2010). This construct has been described elsewhere (such as in Cervetti & Pearson, 2005) in terms of situated knowledge to capture the idea that this is knowledge used to shape practice in particular settings (such as classrooms).

Elbaz (1981) suggested such a theoretical structure for personal practical knowledge when he stated, “But a sense of order and a structure inherent in practical knowledge is also required.” Elbaz proposed three terms intended to reflect varying degrees of generality in teachers’ knowledge. These terms are rules of practice, image,
and practical principles. The rules of practice may be thought of as routines that are followed methodically (if not automatically). The images are tied to intuitive ways of teaching. The practical principles are framing constructs used reflectively to guide, inspect, and transform the known into the new.

**Practical Principles of Teaching**

We lean on Elbaz’s framework for teacher knowledge and in particular on the notion of practical principles as the organizer for the two sections that follow. Without apology, we frame these principles in terms of the practicing teacher. We have struggled in settling on an adjective to describe our ideal teacher. We started with thoughtful teacher, but found it a bit ethereal. We toyed with effective teacher, but found it too behavioral. We considered pragmatic teacher (to capture the close relationship between theory and practice), but found it a bit obscure. We also considered reflective teacher, but thought that phrase was overused in the teacher education literature. So practicing teacher was all that was left. We like it because of its focus on practice; at that same time we fear that it might not convey enough of a sense of how theory and practice are wedded in enacting practice. So when you read practicing teacher, think thoughtful, effective, pragmatic, reflective, practicing teacher!

The first set of ten principles are related to general principles of teaching.

### Ten General Principles to Guide the Practicing Teacher

1. The Principle of Praxis
2. The Principle of Purpose
3. The Principle of Serendipity
4. The Principle of Exploration
5. The Principle of Reflection
6. The Principle of Community
7. The Principle of Service
8. The Principle of Flexibility
9. The Principle of Caring
10. The Principle of Reward
The Principle of Praxis

The practicing teacher understands and acts on the understanding that education has the power to transform individuals and society (for the better, or sometimes for the worse).

According to Paulo Freire, praxis is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1970, p. 36). Like Dewey, Freire was a pragmatist who believed in the power of democracy and a curriculum grounded in experience. According to Glass (2001), Dewey’s and Freire’s views on teaching and learning are quite parallel. Dewey’s views are framed in terms of a biological-organic conception of human existence and growth with emphasis on intelligent adaptation to the environment through problem solving. Dewey argued that the conditions that “maximize this evolutionary adaptive potential are precisely those linked to the formation of the ideal society: full participation, open communication with minimal barriers, critical experimental practice aimed at overcoming problems, and close attention to the consequences of actions” (Glass, 2001, p. 17). Freire situates his philosophy in the context of social structures and in the ways in which societies can potentially oppress some while privileging others. Freire warned that a system of education that is not critically minded may fall into the trap of perpetuating inequality rather than promoting opportunity. For Freire, education should be directed toward promoting freedom of thought and action for the individual and for the society through critical self-reflection and action. In the end, education must be directed toward something, and if not freedom of thought and action, what else? In assuming the role of teacher, the individual has taken on a responsibility to his or her students and to his or her society that is far beyond that of an individual citizen.

The Principle of Purpose

The practicing teacher always operates in the moment with a clear understanding of purpose.

While the principle of praxis operates at the broadest level of a practicing teacher’s professional life, the principle of purpose operates...
Principles of Practice for the Teaching of Reading

at the most specific level of daily teaching. Teachers are, at any given moment, forced to make choices. Practicing teachers make these choices based on their learners’ knowledge and their own knowledge of the important intermediate and long-term learning goals they hold for their students. A pragmatic philosophy focuses attention on the relationship between actions (the results of these choices) and outcomes (what students know, sense, or feel as a consequence of pedagogy and experience). The teacher’s critical examination of teaching events in relation to purpose is at the very heart of learning through practice. Whether the teacher engages in cooperative learning, inquiry learning, or direct instruction, there is always purpose.

In particular, teacher clarity on the outcomes for teaching optimizes the critical examination of the action/outcome relationship that shapes teacher learning. A shared understanding of these purposes and outcomes that both teacher and learner can articulate enhances the possibilities for both teacher and student learning. When teacher and learner have co-constructed and jointly committed to the learning outcomes, learning for both is enhanced even more. Learners in classrooms are offered choices. Learners make these choices, supported by a practicing teacher, through a careful consideration of and conversation around the desired outcomes, potential obstacles along the path, and strategies for working around these. One way to think about the student role in settings where purposes and outcomes are tightly linked is that when students are given both voice and choice in the process, they are likely to be more motivated participants in the learning process.

The Principle of Serendipity

The practicing teacher, aware of the dangers of routine, is open to opportunities of the moment.

Teaching can become so bound up in comfortable routines (as in Elbaz’s rules of practice) that there is hardly space left for the unexpected. As important as it is in everyday learning, purpose and routine can become the enemy of learning. It is the unexpected that opens doors to transformative learning opportunities. James

When students are given both voice and choice in the process, they are likely to be more motivated participants in the learning process.
Marshall was inspired by a drop of green paint that had fallen in the wrong place to create the characters George and Martha and the story of split pea soup. William Herschel was looking for comets and initially identified the planet Uranus as a comet until he noticed the circularity of its orbit and its distance suggested that it was indeed a planet. Percy Spencer invented the microwave oven while testing a magnetron for radar sets. He noticed that a peanut candy bar in his pocket had melted when exposed to radar waves. A child’s question that, on first glance, may seem out of left field (or at least off the lesson focus) may be the catalyst for much more powerful learning. At even a more critical level, the principle of serendipity relates to the permeable curriculum connecting the classroom to the world. What teacher in the United States in 2005 did not use hurricane Katrina as an opportunity to explore important concepts in science and social studies, regardless of grade level?

**The Principle of Exploration**

The practicing teacher is always in the process of changing his or her practices based on the exploration of possibilities in his or her classroom.

Dewey, as a pragmatist, believed in the importance of problem solving for productive teaching/learning environments. For Dewey, the struggle to recognize, engage, and solve problems was the core of all learning. The experiential curriculum relies on activity that engages the learner in educative experiences rooted in goals and aspirations. Learners are motivated to explore the unknown to gain control over it. Teachers are no different. While respecting Dewey’s emphasis on the term *experience*, we have chosen to use the term *exploration* in the framing of this principle. We opt for exploration for two reasons. First, exploration encompasses Dewey’s requirements for educative experiences and continuity of experiences. Second, exploration promotes the view of the learner (the teacher or the student) as active. There is less emphasis on experiences as things that are provided and more emphasis on the need to construct meaning through exploration.
Exploration as a scientific endeavor privileges another feature of quality instruction: authenticity of purpose and action. Exploration occurs in the natural world largely for purposes of learning about what makes that natural world around us tick; we are constantly trying to unearth the fundamental processes that shape our very existence in that world. Exploration is thus inherently authentic; we study the real world around us, not some specially constructed world that some of us created. The metaphor of authenticity is powerful in its application to teaching and learning in school settings; we want school tasks, texts, and even tests to possess an air of authenticity—to look as much as possible like tasks, texts, and assessments that would occur outside of school settings, such as in the workplace, the home, and the community. The danger in creating special tasks and texts for purposes of specific instructional goals is that we end up reifying (making real what is not) those texts and tasks, thus giving them a life of their own and preventing students from learning how to apply cognitive skills and strategies to the texts and tasks of the world outside of school. The exploration of authentic tasks (with inherent ambiguity and risk qualities) is the preferred path for a curriculum.

The Principle of Reflection

The practicing teacher engages in reflection through and following teaching activity as a tool of problem solving and goal setting.

Dewey recognized the important role of reflection in learning through experience. While Dewey identified five stages in reflection, he essentially regarded the act of reflection as holistic and an “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). He distinguished between primary and secondary experiences and believed that reflection was the secondary experience, beginning when the primary experience fails to meet the needs of the learner (Miettinen, 2000). Tools of reflection range from a teacher’s journal to the exercise cycle—practically any space that provides an opportunity to engage deeply with the second experience.
Donald Schon (1983) has helped us understand that the reflection process may operate in a double-loop cycle. Practicing teachers do not limit their reflection to the teaching experience (reflection in action); they also critically examine the perceived governing variables that surround the act of teaching (reflection on action). Attention to governing variables in the reflection process in the current scene is likely to include the press of standards, mandates, consequential assessments, and scripted curriculum on teaching. At the same time, as practicing teachers use reflection for their own learning, they begin to find ways for students in their classrooms to use reflection as a learning tool. Both Dewey and Schon agree that reflection must always lead to changes in practice; indeed, without the action that leads to change, it isn’t reflection, but rather some sort of random mental exercise.

The Principle of Community

The practicing teacher engages in discussions around experience within and across multiple communities with the purpose of growing personally and giving back professionally.

In the history of the human race, social communities arose, at least in part, in response to the need to accomplish tasks (survival, production, and even education) that an individual could not perform alone or could perform much better with others. Only recently have we come to appreciate the important role that community and social life play in the development of our language, our thinking, and our identities—even as we engage in those activities as individuals. The view of the classroom where rules for getting along are essential to maintain the order that permits learning has given way to a view of the classroom as a community of learners that includes the teacher and the students. Teachers, in their professional lives, must rely on communities to support learning. These communities may not always be those formalized by the structure of schools (for example, grade-level teams or an assigned mentor–new teacher partnership) but may be communities that arise informally. Some examples include a small group of teachers getting together to explore
an alternative approach to informal assessment in the classroom writing program; a group of teachers from different schools coming together around the study of social justice and the development of a peace curriculum; a group of university-based teacher educators coming together with a group of teachers in a school to explore possible partnerships in preservice teacher preparation; and a group of community leaders partnering with a group of teachers to explore the possibility of service learning opportunities for students in the community surrounding the school. These kinds of activities reflect the creation of flexible, often mission-driven, learning communities that break down the isolation of the self-contained teacher and classroom and create new possibilities for learning.

Part of the responsibility in being a professional is learning how to belong to many communities—and to respect and do justice to each. Part of the responsibility of being a teacher is to introduce each and every student to the benefits and responsibilities of being a part of a community, for each student will have many opportunities to accept or reject community membership and responsibility throughout his or her life. From the pragmatic perspective, these layers of communities open up new challenges and new opportunities to address outcomes important to learners in the moment and in their lives as adults. Within all of these communities, language and thinking expand. An old saying about teaching is that teaching is what happens when you close the classroom door. Nothing could be further from the truth—teaching... is what happens when you open the classroom door.

The Principle of Service

The practicing teacher serves the learners in his or her classroom and their parents.

Within a pragmatic philosophy, the ethic of responsibility argues that individuals are responsible for the consequences of their actions. Teaching, as a service profession, is client oriented. Teachers work for those they serve—the children in their classrooms and their parents.
Teachers are like medical doctors and nurses who serve their patients, and attorneys and (the best of our) politicians who serve their clients and constituents. Professionals do not serve institutions. It is only an accident that teachers happen to be housed in institutions. The ethical and moral responsibility for the student falls on the teacher. In a perfect world, schools would be organized to support the teacher at the point of delivery. In this world, principals would serve teachers. Superintendents would serve principals. Accountability would be bottom up, with the client (the student and his or her family) ultimately in charge. But that is not the reality of our world. The reality is just the opposite as different levels of policymakers, such as the federal government, states, districts, and schools, have conspired, intentionally or not, to use mandates that constrain rather than inform teaching, and they do it from the top down. Too often our conversations tend to focus more on raising test scores than on ensuring that our students and teachers are engaging in important work in classrooms. Too often today our conversations are limited to the academic (in particular on what is tested) and not on a critical examination of the personal, social, cultural, and moral consequences of teaching and learning.

The Principle of Flexibility

The practicing teacher expects challenges and is strategic in finding alternative approaches without compromising on his or her goals. Flexibility in teaching is well documented as a quality of effective practice. Seldom do lessons unfold as planned. Teachers must be nimble, so that they can adapt within a lesson to unanticipated events or responses in ways that make learning possible. To be a “practicing” teacher is to recognize the reality of the moment and respond. For a teacher to simply carry on down a planned path ignoring the reality of current circumstances is a recipe for failure. Flexibility involves adjusting the strategies we use to achieve a particular goal; it is intentional. We would argue that teachers who are particularly effective are transparent in the adaptations they make during teaching. They are explicit in sharing with their students...
why and how they are adjusting a plan. The teacher’s stance of flexibility in teaching is an important model for students so that they become flexible in the ways in which they approach problem solving and in the challenges they face.

Flexibility, though, is not a principle manifested only in the context of lessons or interactions with students. This is particularly the case for practicing teachers who challenge the status quo of how schools work and expectations for students. These teachers often face pressures to engage in ways that they see as inconsistent with the needs of students. Prescriptive curriculum mandates, assessment demands, and peer pressure to conform may present a greater challenge than the teacher faces inside of the lesson. Long ago, Postman and Weingartner (1969) wrote about the need for teachers to assume a “subversive” stance to push back on a context that constrains. A direct, confrontational approach seldom works. Rather, teachers learn to be flexible in adjusting the path they take without losing sight of the goals. Some teachers may use a strategy of creative compliance, adhering to the letter of the law (mandate) while ensuring no compromise to their teaching principles. Some teachers may follow the “easier to ask forgiveness than ask for permission” strategy when innovating in the classroom.

**The Principle of Caring**

A practicing teacher acts on the understanding that caring is necessary to build the core relationships essential to the teaching and learning transaction.

Nell Noddings has articulated a compelling vision of the caring teacher extended into a view of the caring classroom and the caring curriculum. The trusting relationships that grow in a caring classroom are critical to learning. Keith (1999) argues that Nodding’s view of caring is rooted in a philosophy of pragmatism with an added dimension of feminist theory. Keith points in particular to the writing of George Herbert Mead—a colleague of Dewey at the
University of Chicago. Mead examined the development of the social self through interactions with others. Ethical behavior emerges out of practice, not out of principle. Ethical caring grows out of the natural caring as found in a mother’s care for a child. Ethical caring is intentional and active. Caring relationships begin to grow through an exploration of how we are alike, moving to the appreciation of how we are different, moving to the bonds that grow out of successful collaborative activity. The establishment of caring relationships supports the risk taking essential to learning activity.

We find strong connections between this ethic of care at the interpersonal level and the commitment in South Africa to an envisioned society through the practice of ubuntu. Ubuntu is a Nguni word from South Africa that addresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that grows from our connection. Ubuntu roughly translates into “humanity or fellow feeling” or “I am because you are.” “A human being can only be a human being through other human beings,” and “People live through the help of others.” Variations on the theme of ubuntu are found throughout Africa. Nussbaum (2003, p. 4) offers typical Shona greetings (from Zimbabwe) as reflecting this spirit of ubuntu:

* Mangwani, marara sei? (Good morning, did you sleep well?)
* Ndarara, kana mararawo (I slept well, if you slept well.)

And at lunchtime:

* Marara sei? (How has your day been?)
* Ndarara, kana mararawo? (My day has been good, if your day has been good.)

The spirit of ubuntu has become a critical part of the social transformation of South Africa from apartheid to reconciliation. The principle of ubuntu is mentioned in the preamble to the new South African constitution. It is educational policy in South Africa that every lesson taught regardless of subject area or the ages of the learners embody the spirit of ubuntu. We cannot underestimate the importance of this caring and relational dimension to the practice of teaching. The caring classroom finds order and flow through a
The caring classroom finds order and flow through a purpose that goes beyond being productive and in ways that can be carried forward in life outside of the classroom.

**The Principle of Reward**

The practicing teacher finds satisfaction—even happiness—in what he does for others, not in what is done for him.

No one would deny that teachers are underpaid. But to believe that the goal of attracting and retaining quality teachers in classrooms can be solved by just increasing pay or tying compensation to student achievement growth or offering the annual “teacher of the year” award is naive if not patently wrong. The pragmatist would ask, What is it that sustains the best teachers to put forward incredible levels of effort day after day, year after year? We believe the kinds of things Philip Jackson discovered over forty years ago regarding the rewards of teaching are as true today as ever (Jackson, 1968):

- Great teachers value the spontaneity of classroom life.
- Great teachers value the immediacy of the classroom and the learning they are part of.
- Great teachers value the autonomy of making decisions around curriculum and instructional approaches.

It would seem that current trends in education, designed as they are to guarantee curricular standards by reducing teacher prerogative in the classroom, are at odds with what is fundamentally rewarding in teaching. The greatest professional sustenance accrues to teachers who stop looking “out” or “up” for recognition but instead look within various learning communities for validation, affirmation, and professional identity. Practicing teachers begin by re-examining classroom culture wherein the manipulation of rewards (mainly the distribution of praise) is used as the primary tool for motivating student engagement and performance. Practicing teachers begin to focus on

Copyright 2011 Solution Tree. All rights reserved. solution-tree.com
May not be posted online, emailed, or otherwise shared electronically.
learning achievements in the classroom in ways that help learners examine, assess, and appreciate their own progress. In such an environment, students learn to rely less on external and more on internal cuing systems to gauge their own learning. Practicing teachers apply this same principle to the various learning communities in which they participate. Satisfaction and perseverance are the results of progress recognized toward goals and purposes.

**Principles of Practice Specific to the Teaching of Reading**

Our emphasis on the meaning of *practice* in the professional life of teachers, as informed by a philosophy of pragmatics, stands in close parallel with recent efforts to frame reading as a social practice. But an older, more popular notion of practice in the teaching of reading comes from a more behaviorally oriented image of practice as drill: activities such as reading sight words on flashcards to build automaticity or rereading texts to build fluency. This kind of practice situates reading as a school activity, quite apart from “real reading.” This view of practice fits well within autonomous models (the highly text-driven technical models that focus on what happens inside the head of an individual during reading) of the reading process and reading acquisition (Street, 1995). In contrast, the social-practice perspective of literacy focuses on engagement with a text in some social context with some purpose in mind. The meanings surrounding these experiences with texts are socially constructed and interpreted. The social-practice perspective requires attention to cognitions and motivations that surround activity. From a pedagogical perspective, the social-practice perspective requires teachers to deliberately consider ways of connecting reading activity that occurs inside the classroom with the kinds of reading activity that occur outside the classroom.

With this socially grounded view of practice and our ten general principles of teaching firmly in mind, we turn our attention to ten principles of effective reading pedagogy that are triply aligned (1) with a social-practice perspective on reading, (2) with our general principles, and (3) with what we know about the process of learning to read (see the feature box on page 25). We provide answers to the following questions:
What are the explicit and implicit principles that practicing teachers of reading use to organize and guide activity?

What guides teachers’ practice as they work to ensure that all students are becoming more effective readers?

We offer a set of principles grounded in the belief that practicing teachers are action oriented and thoughtfully adaptive in their efforts to support growth in literacy. Each of the specific principles is practice oriented and, as with the general principles, framed in terms of the practicing teacher.

### Ten Specific Principles to Guide the Practicing Teacher of Reading

1. The Principle of Reading in a Literate Environment
2. The Principle of Reading as Meaning Making
3. The Principle of Reading as Social Practice
4. The Principle of Reading as a Developmental Process
5. The Principle of Reading as Balance
6. The Principle of Reading as a Strategic Process
7. The Principle of Scaffolding Reading Processes
8. The Principle of Reading Assessment as Consequential
9. The Principle of Adaptability in Teaching Reading
10. The Principle of Teaching Reading as a Tool

### The Principle of Reading in a Literate Environment

The practicing teacher of reading works with his or her students to create a literate environment that continually reinforces the utility, practicality, and joy of reading.

Extending the general principle of community into the effective teaching of reading in the classroom context, these teachers understand classrooms as spaces that can be used to support students as they link their literate lives in the classroom to their social spaces outside the classroom. These are classroom environments in which students witness and participate in the ways in which reading, along with writing and language study, is used as a tool for the development of learning, enjoyment, insight, reflection, and self-fulfillment.
Students who daily interact with print, read what others have written, and write to, with, and for others develop conceptual understandings about the value of reading as a transformative tool for the remainder of their life. The classroom literate environment is part physical, part social, and part psychological. The literate environment is physical in the sense of the variety of texts, both commercial and locally constructed, and the organization of these texts. The literate environment is social in the sense that these texts are actively engaged with and interpreted in the context of teaching and learning with peers and teachers. The literate environment is psychological in the sense that the classroom is a safe place to explore, take risks, and learn. The classroom environment serves as both a window and a mirror of literate lives. The window ensures that the literate lives of students outside of school can find a path into the classroom and that the literate lives of students inside the classroom can readily flow into daily life outside of school. The mirror dimension of the literate environment offers a critical space for the teacher and students to carefully inspect their own practices and set priorities and goals for growth.

The Principle of Reading as Meaning Making

The practicing teacher of reading acts on the understanding that reading instruction provides students opportunities to construct meaning through the texts they read.

Extending the general principle of exploration into effective classroom teaching, these teachers situate reading activity in the context of problem spaces, questions, or interests that are important to the learner. Practicing teachers teach enabling skills (they enable understanding but they themselves are not understanding) that allow readers to unlock words and their meanings, process syntax (both simple and complex), and clarify misunderstandings on the way to making meaning. Practicing teachers know that in asking students to construct meaning, they will need to teach students how to engage all the resources at their disposal as students activate their background knowledge, discover new information, and construct
new understandings. For optimum learning to occur, these teachers know that their students should think about what they already know about a topic, gather new information from the text (and, if appropriate, from experience), and gradually come to understand the topic at hand. Students who do not receive help in learning the strategies used in these three areas (activating prior knowledge, reading for information, and constructing their own models of text meaning) usually have trouble with difficult reading material and, consequently, learn less—both in any given lesson and cumulatively across a year or a school career.

The Principle of Reading as Social Practice

The practicing teacher of reading acts on the understanding that every act of reading and every act of teaching reading are inherently social and interactive—they require readers and teachers to engage in reciprocal negotiation processes.

Extending the general principle of community into the effective teaching of reading, these teachers emphasize the social nature of reading and reading pedagogy. The meanings students create for the texts they read are complex negotiations involving an unseen author, the traces of meaning the author left for them to decipher in the text, a practicing teacher to serve as a guide, and an interpretive community of peers with whom to share and revise provisional meanings. Practicing teachers help students discover how this negotiation process works.

In the same way, practicing teachers of reading act on the understanding that reading instruction is an inherently interactive, social, and reciprocal negotiation process. Just as students learn to read literary and informational texts, so they learn to read pedagogical texts (the texts teachers create inside the classroom). The meanings students develop about their instructional situations involve similarly complex negotiations among self, teacher, peers, and the situation itself. Teachers and students provide one another with demonstrations of how to build, share, and revise models of meaning, both of the texts they read and the instruction they are trying to render sensible. This is nothing more or less than an extension of Paulo Freire’s (1970) admonition/observation that as human beings we
It is useful for all teachers to realize that students are trying as hard to make sense of them as teachers as they are the texts to which we hold them accountable. learn to read the word (written texts) and the world (the broad panoply of experience that life presents to us). It is useful for all teachers to realize that students are trying as hard to make sense of them as teachers as they are the texts to which we hold them accountable.

The Principle of Reading as a Developmental Process

The practicing teacher of reading acts on the understanding that reading develops as a process of emerging expertise.

Reading is not best learned, if ever learned, through the acquisition of a set of isolated skills picked up one by one along an assembly line offered by the teacher and the commercial (or state or district-mandated) reading program. Instead, a single central goal—building meaning—carries the teacher and his or her students from one situation to the next. Extending the general principles of purpose and exploration into the effective teaching of reading, the teacher focuses on what is important for the students at that moment. Need in a developmental perspective is not tied to the kind of deficit thinking so prominent in teaching today (as in, “What is missing here that the student needs to know that I must teach?”). Rather, need in a developmental perspective is based on the assumption that the student is an active learner. Thus, a teacher who is responsive to a student’s reading interest or curiosity is adapting the curriculum to the needs of the student. The practicing teacher follows the lead of the student into the learning she is exploring. This perspective positions the learner as active and building knowledge and gaining control over processes.

What changes over time is the students’ level of reading expertise and topical knowledge, along with the amount and type of conceptual and contextual scaffolding teachers need to provide to ensure that all of their students are successful. Teachers would be better off to regard their role not as the source and purveyor of knowledge and wisdom, but as a tour guide leading knowledgeable and purposeful apprentices on a journey toward
increasing mastery of the secrets of reading and the acquisition of knowledge about the world they are trying so hard to make sense of.

**The Principle of Reading as Balance**

The practicing teacher of reading embraces a framework of balance in conceptualizing and delivering curriculum.

It is commonplace for reading curriculum theorists to construct a curriculum beginning with the basics of specific skill orientations/processes (letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics) and then moving on to higher processes of oral language development, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and critical reading. *Balance* is viewed here as something that exists in the curriculum (even to the distribution of time devoted to particular reading activity). We understand and accept that curricular perspective on balance (see Pearson, Raphael, Benson, & Madda, 2007 for an elaborated treatment of curricular balance), and we believe that balance across atomistic skills and global processes is essential. But there is more to be said about balance.

There is an alternative perspective on balance, one that conceptualizes balance as a characteristic of the reader rather than of the curriculum. Teachers guide students toward becoming competent readers with elaborate skill infrastructures, high motivation to read and learn, and strong habits of mind. Attention to balance helps to create flexibility in the reader through simultaneous attention to all. Extending the general principle of flexibility into the effective teaching of reading, we see the need both for the reader to become flexible in balancing processes and the teacher to be flexible in responding to the needs of the learner. The most well-elaborated approach to balance comes from a delightfully simple metaphor popularized by Freebody and Luke (1990) in the four resources model, which suggests that readers need the skill and flexibility to move freely among four stances toward reading:

1. **Reader as decoder**—In this stance, the reader focuses on getting the message the author left on the page. (So what is the author trying to say here?)
2. **Reader as meaning maker**—In this stance, the reader focuses on using his or her personal resources (for example, knowledge and strategic skill) to create a coherent model of meaning for a text. (What did you learn from this text that you didn’t already know?)

3. **Reader as text user**—In this stance, the reader focuses on understanding the form-function relationships in text by analyzing how writers use particular words, structures, and genres to achieve particular effects on readers. (How does the author’s choice of words shape our understanding of the main character?)

4. **Reader as text critic**—In this stance, the reader moves from understanding of form-function relations to an evaluation of authorial motives and intentions. (What is the author trying to persuade us of in this essay? Why?)

In adopting a balanced approach of the sort we are describing, a teacher would be embracing general teaching principles of purpose, exploration, and reflection. The exploration comes in the form of leading students on a journey across the landscape defined by this range of stances. We want readers who change their stances between texts and even within a given text. The purpose is transparent: we change our stance depending on our purpose. And the reflection is embedded in the very process of figuring out why different approaches are needed to serve different situations, texts, and purposes.

**The Principle of Reading as a Strategic Process**

The practicing teacher of reading acts on the understanding that reading instruction must promote strategies.

The general principles of purpose, flexibility, and serendipity drive this specific principle of reading pedagogy. Teachers begin instruction with some intentions, usually curricular goals—understandings about what reading is and how it works—that they want students to achieve and some teaching strategies for helping students achieve them. But they realize that they have to adapt their goals and their strategies just as soon as they start teaching, in response to students’ understanding of the goals and strategies they use as
Principles of Practice for the Teaching of Reading

31

Practicing teachers of reading apply this same tension between intention and adaptation to the strategies and understandings they are trying to help students develop. They know that, like their own instruction, reading strategies are as adaptable as they are intentional. Reading strategies begin as conscious plans that readers use to make sense of text. They are intentional; readers have a few predetermined ideas about how to go about building meaning. But reading strategies are also adaptable; they can and should change quickly and easily depending on how readers size up the situation at hand. Good readers change what they do depending on their perceptions about the text (How hard is it?), the task (What do I have to do to achieve my goal or satisfy the teachers’ goal?), their knowledge resources (What do I know that will help me understand this text?), their own purpose (Why am I doing this? What could I gain from it?), and the consequences of reading (What will happen to me if I do or do not succeed?).

Practicing teachers of reading help students develop understandings and related strategic processes through careful inspection of literate activity and literacy products. The general principle of reflection is applied here to reading instruction. This principle requires that teachers of reading bring students inside the act of reading in order to develop their understanding of reading both as a global process and a more specific set of processes that tell us how, when, and where to use different strategies and skills. Developing both types of understandings simultaneously is extremely difficult. The process is something like the creation of a tapestry, where specific patterns must be understood in order to understand and create the whole design. As we help students create this tapestry of reading, we know that they must understand the specific patterns that make it up (including the functions they serve for the entire tapestry), but in the end, it is the full tapestry that we enjoy, understand, and use. The smaller patterns become a vehicle for making the whole tapestry accessible. While this duality is difficult to achieve in reading
instruction (it is based on holding this tension between the whole and the parts in a delicate balance), it is necessary if students are to develop appropriate understandings of reading as a cognitive, aesthetic, and cultural practice. It is the hardest—but most rewarding—part of teaching reading.

The Principle of Scaffolding Reading Processes

The practicing teacher of reading carefully scaffolds learning in a way that allows students to use and gradually gain control of a skill, strategy, or tool before they fully understand it.

This business of scaffolding, particularly scaffolding that is sensitive to individual differences among students and the situation at hand is at once both the most elusive and the most beautiful (and satisfying) aspect of teaching reading. Scaffolding is what teaching is all about, and in delivering just-in-time individualized scaffolding, a teacher embraces most of the general principles we have described. Scaffolding is inherently exploratory and serendipitous because it requires that teachers be sensitive to the moment-by-moment enactment of learning in the classroom environment—and that sensitivity makes it inherently reflective, too. It is clearly communitarian because it is enacted within the context of a classroom community of learners. And providing scaffolding, especially individualized scaffolding, is the ultimate hallmark of teaching as a service to the teacher’s number-one clientele—the students who enter his or her classroom hoping to finally get the help they need to become real readers.

By using analogies, explanations, explicit cues, redirecting metaphors, elaborations, and modeling (in short, anything they can find to make what must seem opaque to students more transparent), teachers can create a form of assistance that allows students to complete a task (like summarizing a test or figuring out the pronunciation and meaning of an obscure word) before they cognitively understand how and when to use it. This form of assistance is highly productive as long as the scaffolding is gradually removed as students gain control of the task. Teachers who teach reading in this way are using what we have come to call the gradual release of responsibility (from teacher to student) for helping readers become independent and self-sufficient readers—readers who know when
and whether they have understood a text, and, if they haven’t, what to do to fix things up.

**The Principle of Reading Assessment as Consequential**

The practicing teacher acts on an understanding that the contexts of accountability in high-stakes testing must be negotiated with the need for students to take responsibility for their own learning as they develop the independence they need to become lifelong learners.

This principle extends the general principles of exploration and reflection. Assessment tools are seen as critical to inform responsive teaching and independent learning. The problem with assessment in our current accountability milieu is that we regard assessment as something someone else does to us, not as something we do to and for ourselves. We forget a fundamental principle of any and all assessment systems—that the student is the number-one client of the assessment system (IRA/NCTE, 2010). The only reason that we as teachers have the right to assess students today is so that they can assess themselves tomorrow. If we kept that idea in our minds as we constructed, administered, and interpreted assessments, we would have more valid, more transparent, and more service-oriented assessments. These assessments would go beyond categorizing kids to actually helping them and their teachers craft curricular activities to promote growth along a pathway to more skilled reading.

Assessments must distinguish clearly between mastery constructs and growth constructs. *Mastery constructs* are the enabling skills of the curriculum—letter sounds, word identification, vocabulary meaning, clarifying; they are all the bits and pieces on the pathway to real reading, but they are *not* real reading. *Growth constructs* are the goals of reading instruction, constructs like comprehension and critical reading; they are the very reason we bother to teach reading in the first place. We celebrate when the mastery constructs are under control so we can get on with real reading. And we always make sure that the growth constructs guide our assessment of student competence and our plans for future curricular activity. Reading for understanding begins the minute students step into the kindergarten classroom, and it is the ultimate justification for each and every moment of instruction devoted to enabling skills.
This understanding of accountability may be at odds with the dominant forms of assessment (high-stakes tests) that are shaping curriculum in classrooms across the United States and in an increasing number of countries around the world. The practicing teacher finds ways to negotiate the spaces between the external demands for accountability and the need for students to be aware of their own learning and growth processes.

The Principle of Adaptability in Teaching Reading

The practicing teacher of reading negotiates the space around specific mandates for curriculum and teaching.

This principle is a direct extension of the flexibility principle. For example, currently most reading curricula, both commercial programs and state or district standards-driven curricula, contain too many skills to teach. Pressured by so much to cover in so little time, teachers quickly gloss over everything, which leaves no time to teach anything very well. Everyone involved—teachers, students, and parents—would benefit from a leaner, meaner curriculum composed of a handful of key processes taught well and frequently applied to lots of authentic texts. In this regard, we are encouraged by the conceptualization of reading we see in the 2010 Common Core Standards (CCSSO/NGA, 2010). They seem to have managed not to let the reading curriculum explode into a cascade of ever-expanding standards that prevent teachers (and students) from engaging in the kind of thoughtful exploration of ideas and processes that characterizes reading at its best.

The Principle of Teaching Reading as a Tool

The practicing teacher of reading understands that just as enabling skills (like phonics and word identification) are a means to an end (comprehension and critique), so reading is not an end unto itself, but rather a tool to enable individuals to accomplish other goals—learning, insight, enjoyment, and participation.
We don’t read for the sake of engaging in the reading process. We read to accomplish specific goals in our lives—to learn something more about outer space, to gain insight into our own motivations, to experience the aesthetic joy by losing oneself in a well-written piece of literature, to gain entry into a book club, or to participate in civic discourse about our collective future. Reading, like writing and language, are better situated as means of achieving these broader goals rather than ends unto themselves. When we situate reading (or writing or language) as an end unto itself, we run the risk of taking pride in promoting readers who can read rather than nurturing readers who do read. There is a mounting body of evidence that this utilitarian (call it pragmatic, if you will, because of the emphasis on the consequences of reading) view of reading pays dividends not only in helping students acquire a portfolio of useful tools but also in promoting better test scores on both subject-matter and reading assessments (Goldschmidt, 2009).

Conclusion

One cannot understand the history of education in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realizes that Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost.

—Ellen Condliffe Lagemann

The progressive movement in education, so closely tied to pragmatism and John Dewey, has become something of a footnote in the history of education. The progressive movement was simultaneously too idealistic and too pragmatic for the times. But as we have come to think about the principles that could and should guide the teaching of reading in these challenging times, we find ourselves drawing inspiration and insight from the “loser” (John Dewey) and the philosophy of pragmatism. Even so, there are many reasons why we align ourselves with Dewey:

- Because we are optimists. Because we believe that the 21st century may lead to a different understanding than the twentieth. And the Common Core Standards, even though
they are externally imposed standards, are more encouraging than what we have seen since 1990.

- Because we believe Dewey was mostly right in what he argued for and was not always interpreted as he would have hoped.

- Because we believe that the struggle to improve teaching and schools is difficult but worth the effort. Our use of Dewey is tied less to his advocacy for progressive schooling than it is on the philosophy of pragmatism (and the key role accorded to experience and consequences of one’s actions) that is core to his thinking.

- Because we believe that through engagement with principles of practice like those we have put forward, we can begin to push back against those who would dismiss teacher education as irrelevant, as the last three U.S. Secretaries of Education (Page, Spellings, and Duncan) have, or argue for “teacher training” rather than teacher education (see Hoffman & Pearson, 2000), as is implicit in most of the current models of mandated reform.

- Because we believe that through engagement with principles of practice, we can push back against those who see successful reform from schools emanating from some combination of mandated standards or high-stakes testing.

- Because we would like to see reform driven by a broader, more uplifting vision of the possible and the practical.

- Because we believe that through engagement with principles of practice, we can push back on the popular notion that research should reveal “best practices” narrowly construed as a set of behaviors, not as ways of doing, thinking, and valuing that will never be “best” but always contextualized in the moment and always evolving.

- Because we are pragmatists.

- Because we are practicing teachers.
References and Resources


