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Rethinking Materials for the Reading Class

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Key Points

1. The ability to read and more specifically to learn from text is fairly widely regarded as an indispensable academic skill.
2. Reading teachers, publishers, and material writers all have a role to play in driving an effective reading curriculum, but all three players need to rethink their roles.
3. A primary shortcoming of many commercially available reading course books is a notable dearth of text as illustrated by the following sampling of typical books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio of Text to: Instructional Explanation &amp; Exercises</th>
<th>Book A</th>
<th>Book B</th>
<th>Book C</th>
<th>Book D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>3:1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A hypothetical 200-page book with text to exercise ratio of 1:4 would have only 50 pages of text. A 200-page book with text to exercise ratio of 5:1 would have 160 pages of text.

4. What’s important in a reading class?
   • Good text and lots of it
   • Opportunity to read
   • Interactions with text
   • Interactions with others around text

5. Thinking of the reading class in terms of the extensive-intensive continuum is pedagogically useful.

6. Key to better materials for the reading class = more text…fewer exercises

7. Wish list of an IEP instructor:
   
   **For extensive reading**
   - More graded fiction
   - More & better quality graded non-fiction
   - Better online sites with graded content
   - More periodicals for college-age English learners

   **Hybrid Texts**
   - Content for both intensive and extensive reading
     10 pages of extensive reading for every 2-3 pages of intensive reading?

   **For intensive reading & content-based instruction**
   - More books with disciplinary focus
   - Multi-theme readers w/ “semi-academic” selections
   - Books that raise awareness of genre-specific organization and discourse
   - More original rather than reprinted work

   **For writing courses**
   More text-rich books with:
   - accessible, interrelated selections for synthesis writing from sources
   - examples of texts that student writers are expected to produce
8. **Publishers should:**

Encourage materials writers to be:

- connoisseurs of text
- writers (of text) … not exercises
- teacher trainers

**IEP Teachers should:**

- Learn to exploit text itself for instructional purposes
- Demand course books that are text rich

**Materials Writers should:**

- Strive to achieve higher ratios of text to auxiliary materials
- Author more original materials
- Recommend (via teacher manuals) techniques and activities that exploit text for instructional purposes

**Conclusion:**

With experienced teachers reading pedagogy revolves around activities that promote:

- Background knowledge
- Knowledge of text structure
- Vocabulary development
- Strategic reading
- Reading fluency
- Interactions around text

Inexperienced teachers can be mentored so that they learn to use texts to teach as experienced reading teachers teach. Publishers and materials writers can facilitate this by writing and publishing materials that have lots of stimulating text and instructional materials (e.g., pedagogical explanation, techniques, and recommendations) that empower teachers to teach.