

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Theories and Models

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE READING

- What is the general definition of a theory?
- Are people aware of the theories that they possess?
- How is the term “theory” used in the field of education?
- Why are theories important to educational practice?
- Why are theories important to educational research?
- How do theories compare and contrast with models?
- What are the advantages of being able to consider life experiences, including those related to the field of reading, from multiple theoretical perspectives?

Sara, a quiet, pretty 8-year-old, squirms uncomfortably in her chair, aware that all eyes are upon her. She stares at the words on the page, unable to utter a sound. At first, her classmates are courteous as they wait for her to respond, but then they grow impatient as her silence persists. The students themselves begin to squirm as they exchange knowing glances with each other: “Here we go again, waiting for Sara to read.” Ms. Brown, the classroom teacher, grows uncomfortable too. Was she wrong to call on Sara to read? Why hasn’t this child been able to keep up with her peers in reading? How can she, Ms. Brown, help Sara learn to read?

This scene, all too common in the United States and throughout the world, depicts a fundamental concern of reading educators: how

to help a child experiencing reading difficulties in the classroom. Even teachers of students not experiencing difficulties struggle with how best to promote their students' literacy growth. Most classroom teachers use all of the materials and strategies at their disposal to help their students achieve. These include reading programs purchased by the school district, supplemental materials they personally collect, ideas adapted from conferences and workshops, approaches borrowed from professional development books, projects downloaded from the Internet, suggestions from their colleagues, and the like. As most educators will attest, a good classroom teacher will try almost anything to help a student succeed in reading. If, after all of a teacher's best efforts, a student is still making insufficient progress, the teacher will turn to a reading specialist or a child study team in his or her school for help. At this point, increased diagnosis and a wider range of interventions are implemented. So goes the approach to most reading instruction in this country.

The link between typical approaches to reading instruction and the content of this text lies in the ways in which classroom teachers, reading specialists, child study team professionals, and reading researchers think about which instructional approaches and assessments should be used in helping students progress in reading. What may not be immediately apparent to these professionals, however, is that the ways in which they approach reading instruction and research are, to a large degree, driven by the theories that they hold regarding the ways in which children learn to read. Many educators are not consciously aware of the theories that drive their practices. Few classroom teachers can tell you which theories contribute to their instruction; even fewer would tell you that they care. For decades, the term "theory" has been associated with something only scholars who live and work in "ivory towers" need to know.

This text seeks to convince educators that understanding the theories that are related to reading instruction, and learning to link these theories to classroom practice, will strengthen both classroom instruction and research. As a result of reading this text, we hope that educators will better understand a full range of theoretical perspectives from which the reading process and reading development can be understood. Subsequently, we hope that deeper understanding of the reading process and reading development will enable educators to use a wider range of approaches when working with students and help teachers to more selectively decide which approaches should be used. Collectively, it is believed that this knowledge can lead to a greater ability to help students learn to read.

WHAT IS A THEORY?: A GENERAL DEFINITION

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2007), a theory is “a set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, especially one that has been repeatedly tested or is widely accepted” (p. 1429). Theories are explanations that are grounded in belief systems usually supported by extensive research and databases, and often held by large groups of people. Competing theories are often studied, tested, and debated over long periods of time. Mertens (2010) wrote that “theories provide frameworks for thinking about the inter-relationships of constructs, and are more limited in scope than paradigms” (p. 8).

There are theories to describe almost every phenomenon in life. One example of a phenomenon that can be examined theoretically is the question of life’s very beginning. A theory of the beginning of human life is the biblical version that God created humans in an instant in the form of Adam and Eve. This theory is known as creationism. A contrasting theory for explaining the beginning of human life is evolution, which posits that humans evolved biologically in a gradual process over a very long period of time from lower ordered species. Large numbers of people subscribe to one or the other of these theories.

With regard to daily life, theories are explanations that people turn to when they are trying to understand what has happened to them in the present or the past, or what might happen to them in the future. When individuals become ill, for example, some attribute the event to a spiritual theory (“it was meant to happen” or “it happened for a reason”), while others attribute it to a biological occurrence such as genetic predisposition; exposure to a particular germ, relationship with nutrition, or a mind–body connection. In general, people adopt particular theories and use them repeatedly throughout their lives to explain a wide variety of experiences. The theories then become the “lenses” through which individuals view the world.

ARE PEOPLE AWARE OF THE THEORIES THAT THEY POSSESS?

People may be conscious or unconscious of the theories that they use in daily living. When individuals are conscious of their theories, or belief systems, they are able to label them, think about them, talk about them with others, and compare their own theories with alternative ones. For

example, a psychologist who applies a treatment based on a specific theory, such as Behaviorism, should be able to explain why he or she is using that treatment and theory instead of others. In contrast, when individuals are unconscious of their theories, they are unable to reflect on or talk about them. A mother who gives her child a treat when the child is well behaved but punishes the child when the child is poorly behaved is applying Behaviorism, even though she may be unaware of it. *Importantly, regardless of whether or not individuals are conscious of the theories they use, the theories still operate and affect the ways in which all human beings see, think about, and respond to the world.* In short, in all areas of life, people perceive the world through their theoretical lenses, whether or not they are aware that these lenses exist.

WHAT IS A THEORY?: A DEFINITION FOR EDUCATION

In many scientific fields, including that of education, the concept of theory is frequently used. When the term “theory” is used in the field of education, it refers to a well-documented explanation for a phenomenon related to teaching and/or learning. This explanation (i.e., theory) then becomes part of the body of content knowledge that constitutes the field.

Educators have a multitude of theories that they can use to explain a wide variety of learning and teaching phenomena. In the field of education, theories are used to explain learning, motivation, memory, achievement, and intelligence, among other things. When a child has difficulty learning to read, for example, one theory (i.e., explanation) is that the cause is related to a cognitive problem. Other theories that might be used to explain the reading problem include theories of motivation, language, behavior, and/or social differences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORIES TO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

As explained above, one of the most important reasons for understanding theories is that individuals’ theories are closely linked to their behaviors and practices. Let’s return to the example above regarding ill health. An individual with a nutritional theory of health and illness would most likely seek healing differently than would an individual with a spiritual theory regarding health and illness. Similarly, in the opening example of

Sara, the child with a reading difficulty, a teacher who theorizes that the child's reading problem is caused by auditory- and or visual-processing deficits would create different educational interventions for Sara than would a teacher whose theory of reading is centered in the concept of motivation. Thus, the link between theory and behavior is the central reason that knowledge of theories is essential for optimal classroom instruction. When teachers become aware of the full range of theories from which their educational practices can radiate, their repertoire of teaching skills can greatly expand. Similarly, when teachers understand the full range of theories from which instructional strategies stem, they can select those interventions that best suit the particular teaching situation, thus optimizing the effectiveness of their instruction. A broad understanding of theories also allows educators to coordinate and provide complementary instructional interventions from a wide variety of theoretical orientations. Hayes (1997), who conducts research with teachers, confirms that thinking related to educational theories does affect teachers' practices.

During instruction, teachers continually interpret the events surrounding their interactions with learners. . . . Their thinking concerns several variables always present during instruction: learners, subject matter, materials, procedures, and time. . . . How teachers think about and deal with these matters ultimately depends on their overall orientation to teaching, as well as the structures of thinking and acting suggested for achieving their goals. . . . Thus, . . . classroom practice is never entirely neutral, but carries with it its own implicit theory of instruction. (p. 50)

In short, "Teachers bring in their theories and beliefs when they plan for teaching and when they attempt to understand and interpret classroom events" (Hayes, p. 51). Coker and White (1993) reiterated this thought: "A generally accepted assumption is that whatever we do in the classroom results from our understanding regarding the nature of children and how they learn. Formally, this assumption is referred to as a theory of learning" (p. 77).

ARE TEACHERS AWARE OF THE THEORIES THAT THEY POSSESS?

Although the link between theory and behavior is always present, educators, like members of the general public, are not always consciously

aware of the theories that guide their behaviors (Constas & Sternberg, 2006). While all teachers possess theories that drive their teaching, they may or may not be able to explicitly describe them. Constas and Sternberg (2006) wrote, “All efforts to enhance learning are based, either implicitly or explicitly, on a theory of how the mind works and on how intellectual skills and abilities may be most effectively developed” (p. xi).

Teachers with a firm grasp of educational and psychological theories have a clear basis for making instructional decisions. Their understanding of educational theory provides them with a foundation for understanding why they are choosing the instructional practices that they use. Such theoretically based instructional decisions are linked to exemplary literacy instruction and improved literacy learning (Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001). Indeed, as Pressley et al. (2001) have found, highly effective, exemplary educators are able to articulate the relationships between what they do in the classroom and their theoretical reasons for doing so. In other words, highly effective teachers align their educational practices with their theoretical beliefs. Additionally, when teachers such as Pressley et al.’s exemplary educators are able to make their instructional theories conscious, they can then discuss and reflect upon them. These discussions and reflections provide avenues for greater understanding of the relationships between educational theory and practice, and thus further facilitate instructional effectiveness. In contrast, teachers who are unaware of the theories that drive their instruction are often unable to provide a coherent explanation for why they choose one set of instructional procedures or materials over another. Psychological and educational theories are not all complementary, and problems may arise when teachers use incompatible theoretically based practices.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORIES TO EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Knowledge of educational theories is central to the work of educational researchers as well as to the work of educational practitioners. Ideally, all research studies have theoretical foundations. Eisenhart and Towne (2003) reported that linking research to relevant theory is one of the principals used to define high-quality, scientifically based research. *Theories are used as the basis for creating a research hypothesis, to generate research variables, to discuss research findings, and to link one study*

with another. Theories are then supported or not supported, proven or disproven, by the findings of research projects. The use of theories and models is also necessary for research publication.

Theories are used to develop a research hypothesis. When researchers are designing a research project, they consider a topic of interest to them to determine their research question or questions. Once the research question, or questions, has been determined, the researchers often make a prediction about what they think the outcome, or outcomes, of the study will be. For example, if a researcher is studying the relationship between preschool children's television viewing and the use of subtitles, the researcher might predict that pairing subtitles with television viewing would be associated with improved rates of early literacy achievement. This prediction is the researcher's *hypothesis*. However, the researcher also needs to state *why* he or she thinks that preschoolers' television viewing with subtitles will be associated with improved rates of early literacy achievement; *this explanation is the researcher's theory*. In this particular example, the researcher might choose Emergent Literacy Theory as his or her theoretical framework to explain his or her hypothesis.

In addition to providing a basis for hypotheses, theories allow research variables to be generated. *Variables* are "the conditions or characteristics that the experimenter manipulates, controls, or observes" (Best & Kahn, 2003, p. 162). Creswell (2002) noted that researchers often turn to theories to identify variables to be investigated and the possible relationships between them: "a theory explains and predicts the relationship between independent and dependent variables. . . . You might think about a theory as a bridge that connects the independent and dependent variables. Theories are no more than broad explanations for what we would expect to find when we relate variables" (p. 137).

One example of the use of a theory to generate variables, and possible relationships between them, is documented in the work of Tracey and Young (2002). These authors were interested in studying the ways in which mothers assist their children during their children's oral reading practice at home. They knew that their research should be framed in a theoretical context. They decided to choose the theory of Social Constructivism to frame their work. In this theoretical perspective, learning is viewed as a result of social interactions between individuals, and oral language patterns are often studied as a way of illustrating these interactions. Tracey and Young then examined other studies that used a social constructivist perspective to see which specific variables had

been previously found to be significant in similar parent–child research projects. The search yielded the identification of a number of variables, including a mother’s educational level, the sex of the child, and the child’s reading ability. Tracey and Young proceeded to use these variables to study mothers and children during children’s at-home oral reading practice. When their study was finished, their research not only extended the current knowledge base regarding mothers’ helping behaviors during children’s reading, it helped affirm that the social constructivist theoretical perspective, and variables generated from it, were useful tools in understanding parent–child dynamics in this specific reading situation.

Theories are used to discuss the findings of research studies in the Discussion section of research papers. Their authors reflect back on their research question or questions, their hypothesis or hypotheses, their findings, and whether or not their predictions, based on their chosen theory, were supported by their data. In evidence of the essential role of theory throughout a manuscript, Anders, Yaden, Iddings, Katz, and Rogers (2014), editors of the prestigious *Journal of Literacy Research*, stated:

The editorial board will be directed to look in particular for potential manuscripts that have a strong, coherent theory base that underlies the research topic presented and how that theory or conceptual framework is revisited throughout the manuscript to undergird the study or argument in focus with an intellectually satisfying, logically plausible and integrated flow of thought and explication. (p. 6)

Theories also provide the frameworks through which various research studies can be linked both within and between fields of study. As stated previously, by definition, theories provide explanations that can be used to describe a variety of phenomena. Therefore, if a theory can be used to explain the research findings in study “A,” it may also be used to explain the findings in study “B,” thus linking the two studies. Research that is theoretically linked to other research makes a more substantial contribution toward extending a knowledge base in any field than that which is not linked (Creswell, 2002).

The development, support, or refutation of theories are the end goals of scientific research. To this point, Gay, Geoffrey, and Airasian (2006) commented that “[i]n its purest form, basic research is research conducted solely for the purpose of developing or refining a theory. Theory development is a conceptual process that requires many research studies conducted over time”(p. 6).

In recognition of the importance of theories to educational research, theoretical frameworks are required for the publication of articles in high-quality research journals and for most doctoral dissertations and master's theses. Theories are central to educational publication because they are the concepts by which scholars explain their research. Researchers use theories as *explanations for why they expect something will happen* in their studies (*their hypotheses*) as well as *why they believe something did happen* (*their Discussion*). Anders, Yaden, Iddings, Katz, and Rogers (2016) emphasized the central role of theory in research publication:

If we as *Journal of Literacy Research (JLR)* editors were to summarize the number one concern of our review board regarding the nearly 600 manuscripts, which have been submitted during our term, it would be the need for literacy researchers to more clearly explicate the conceptual foundations of the theories invoked and subsequent impact of those theoretical frameworks upon design, analysis, and interpretation of the studies conducted. (p. 3)

Just as there is no single correct theory or model for practitioners to use when engaging in classroom practice, there is no correct single theory or model for a researcher to use when framing his or her research. Researchers can choose from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives when situating their studies, and in fact, though this is rarely done, they can simultaneously present their research from multiple theoretical viewpoints. The important point here is that, like practitioners, researchers benefit from an awareness of the broad and diverse choice of theories that are available to them. Just as theories provide orienting frameworks for teachers' practices, theories provide orienting frameworks for researchers' investigations. The more aware researchers are of the value of theoretical orientations to high-quality research, the more likely they will be to learn about and use theories in their work.

IS A MODEL DIFFERENT FROM A THEORY?

Although both theories and models strive to provide explanations for phenomena, there appears to be disagreement in the field of education with regard to whether or not the terms "theory" and "model" can be used interchangeably (Kezar, 2001). "Model and theory," Kezar stated, "are not necessarily interchangeable words, although many scholars use

them as such. In fact, theory suggests abstract contemplation or insight, whereas model connotes a set of plans or procedures” (p. 26).

Tracey, Storer, and Kazerounian (2010) contrasted theories with two kinds of models. They begin by presenting theories as “narrative descriptions” that “do not attempt to create graphic depictions, computer simulations, or hypotheses of neural correlates of cognition” (p. 109). They noted that, historically, the earliest and most predominant theories of traditional literacy have been narrative in nature. The primary reason for the historic popularity of narrative models is that only in the past few decades have researchers had the technological capabilities to begin to consider the process of reading from computational and neuroimaging perspectives. Tracey et al. added that

narrative theories are popular because there is no expectation that theorists will create computer simulations or neuroimaging data to support their hypotheses. The absence of the constraints to produce computational simulations or neural evidence to support hypotheses frees theorists to contemplate the cognitive processing of literacy in an almost unbounded manner, a highly appealing position from which to work. (p. 110)

Tracey et al. then contrasted the concepts of theories with “box and pointer” models.

In contrast to narrative descriptions of cognition processing, box and pointer models present diagrams or flowcharts designed to differentiate between types of processing and/or processors within the brain and are therefore valuable for visualizing cognitive processing. Like narrative descriptions, box and pointer models share the unbounded advantage of not requiring computer architecture or neuroimaging data to support their positions, and are further strengthened by the addition of a graphic organizer. Also like narrative theories, these perspectives can yield inferential explanations for biological phenomena. (pp. 112–113)

Next, Tracey et al. (2010) contrasted box and pointer models with computational models:

Computational models strive to quantitatively reflect cognitive processing. Details of computational frameworks may be inspired by, or designed to mimic, actual biological systems. The importance of computational models of cognitive processing is that they begin to specify what sorts of predictions can be made regarding human performance on any particular task. A correct computational model of cognitive processes can provide a

wide array of quantitative predictions ranging from how quickly letters are perceived to when word meanings are identified. Variations of computational models are often compared to see which model best predicts and reflects actual human behavior. Using quantitative results to choose between alternative computational models is likely to become increasingly important as we attempt to create more and more accurate theories of cognitive processes associated with specific tasks and skills such as new literacies. (p. 116)

Historically, however, many researchers have not distinguished between the concepts of theories and models and, in fact, have used the terms interchangeably. In Rosenblatt's (1994) writing, for example, this distinction is not clear. She stated that "a theoretical model by definition is an abstraction, or generalized pattern devised in order to think about a subject" (p. 1057). Here, the difference between the concept of a model and the concept of a theory is not discernible. Tierney (1994) also uses the term "model" interchangeably with the term "theory." He wrote that "[models] pursue explanations that account for a host of variables and the variables' relationships to one another" (p. 1165). Regarding use of the term "model," Thomas (1996) stated that "the term has caused some confusion because one writer will use it in a broad sense while another will limit its meaning" (p. 12). In the end, Thomas decided to use the terms "model" and "theory" interchangeably in his text to compare theories of child development.

Given the inconsistency in our discipline regarding the terms "theories" and "models," in this book we have decided to adhere to authors' own practices in descriptions of their work. When authors present their thoughts using the term "theory," we too use that term. When authors present their thoughts using the term "model," we likewise use that word. When authors use the two terms interchangeably to describe their work, we do the same. Furthermore, we have used the term "perspective" to describe the umbrella category into which similar theories fall. Therefore, each chapter in this book focuses on a theoretical perspective containing specific, related, theories and models.

THE VALUE OF MULTIPLE LENSES

As early as 1994, Tierney noted that the field of literacy learning seemed to have passed beyond the search for a single theory or model of reading that could comprehensively explain all the phenomena (e.g., reading

process, reading development, reading disability, and reading instruction) observed in our field. Rather, he suggested that “the search for a single model of reading has been supplanted by recognition of the worth of multiple models of different reading and writing experiences” (p. 1163). Many authors concur with this perspective. Woolfolk (1998) wrote: “Few theories explain and predict perfectly. . . . Because no one theory offers all the answers, it makes sense to consider what each has to offer” (p. 16). Schoenfeld (2006) added:

There is a tendency in the field toward grand (and almost always unsubstantiated) theories and claims for them. This happens consistently at the “big theory” level. The behaviorists, constructivists, cognitive scientists, and sociocultural theorists all claim to explain everything . . . the fact is that most of the theories have “applicability conditions”; they only apply some of the time and the trick is to figure out when. . . . The serious job of theory refinement is to say how well a theory works in which conditions. (p. 22)

M. Siegel (personal communication, February 1, 2011) noted the importance of recognizing the shift of valuing multiple perspectives as recent.

I think it would be helpful to point out that approaching educational problems from multiple theoretic lenses is a rather recent idea. When I entered the profession in the late 1970s, theories were regarded as a way to account for a particular phenomenon and although there were categories of theories (e.g., information processing, psycholinguistic), it was generally believed that putting forth a new theory was an attempt to supplant an existing theory. In other words, this was a value-laden undertaking, and not one in which all theories were considered equal in their explanatory power. In fact, I believe the so-called “reading wars” were debates over which theory was the “correct” one to guide decisions about how to teach reading. . . . I would argue that the recent shift toward “multiple perspectives” reflects the postmodern turn the social sciences took in the late 20th century.

Authors who believe in the importance of multiple lenses argue that each theory makes a unique and valuable contribution to understanding the phenomena under examination. A metaphor of a group of artists all painting the same scene can be used to explain the benefit of multiple perspectives. In the painting metaphor, each piece of artwork will be different—for example, some painted in a realistic style, whereas others

adopted an impressionist or an abstract style. Yet each artist will provide a unique way of viewing the scene at hand. The same is true regarding educational theories and models that aim to explain an educational issue: each of the theories and models provides a unique and valuable view on the topic.

It is important to note that the value of multiple lenses has different implications for classroom practitioners versus educational researchers. As stated above, a wide array of theories and models is available to classroom practitioners. Good practice can be grounded in multiple theoretical frameworks. For example, an effective teacher may sometimes use practices grounded in a behavioral perspective and other times may use practices based on constructivist, cognitive, or motivational frameworks. For classroom teachers, multiple lenses often coexist and complement each other in their teaching. In contrast, researchers who need to situate their study in a theoretical framework typically choose a single perspective from the many perspectives that are available. Although it is possible for researchers to use multiple theoretical perspectives in their work, most often they do not. As Brumbaugh and Lawrence (1985) wrote, researchers typically choose the theory or model “that is most relevant to the problems and aims at hand” (p. 22). Additionally, many researchers have a particular affinity for one theory as an explanation of their work rather than another. Indeed, as Thomas (1996) stated, “data can assume quite different meanings when different theories are used for organizing the facts” (p. 11).

The use of multiple lenses is also seen in classroom application activities and teaching anecdotes illustrating each of the theories in this book. Importantly, many of these teaching ideas can be used to reflect multiple theories. For example, the popular practice of brainstorming a web with students prior to reading can be used to illustrate a classroom application activity reflective of Associationism, Connectionism, and/or Schema Theory. Thus, the reader is urged to maintain an open and flexible stance when reading this volume. The ability to see the ways in which classroom practices are reflective of many theories strengthens the mind of the reader and underscores the primary premise of this text: the value of multiple perspectives in improving literacy education.

THEORIES AND MODELS INCLUDED IN THIS TEXT

Adding to the already described complexity of reading theories and models is the diversity of the fields that have generated information

related to this topic. As described in this book's Preface, theories and models with implications for reading instruction and research do not have their own unique history. Rather, the theories and models that have impacted our field originated in diverse content areas, including general education, psychology, sociology, linguistics, and neuroscience, to name a few. Additionally, there are many variations to basic theories that then yield new theories (Thomas, 1996).

In this text we have sought to identify the theories and models that have great significance for the field of reading. Using some of the criteria listed above, we have included theories and models that have attracted much scholarly attention throughout time, those that have most impacted instruction and/or research, and those that have steered the field in a new direction. As stated in the Preface, a great deal of thought has been given to which theories and models to include in the text and how they should be organized. The result of this is a text that is semi-historically organized according to the authors, editors, and reviewers' perceptions. Following a great deal of deliberation, the authors, editors, and reviewers of this volume have concluded that there is no single correct or incorrect way to organize the theories that have impacted the study of reading, nor is there a black-and-white line dividing those theories that should be included in a volume such as this and those that should be omitted. Even the dates attached to the emergence of the theories in this work are approximate. Despite the chapter titles and accompanying time frames used to organize this text, readers should be aware that the emergence and development of the actual theories and models that have influenced the field of reading have been greatly affected by each other. Ultimately, the lines drawn between the chapters of this text are primarily abstract and are presented to illuminate the differences between each theoretical perspective. In reality, all the theories are influenced by those theories that preceded them and with which they coexist. The lines of separation and distinction are not nearly as clear as the organization of this text suggests. As the Buddhists would say, in reality all is one.

SUMMARY

A theory is an explanation for a phenomenon that is widely held by a large group of people. In the field of education, the term "theory" refers to explanations of learning and teaching phenomena that have been developed over long periods of time, following intensive research and

writing efforts. While some writers use the terms “theories” and “models” interchangeably, others suggest that models serve as a metaphor to explain and represent theories. Theories and models are held consciously and unconsciously by all individuals. Whether held consciously or unconsciously, theories shape individuals’ behavior in all areas of life, including teaching and research.

Knowledge of theories and models provides a necessary foundation for coordinated and cohesive instructional activities. In the absence of a strong theoretical basis, educators use teaching techniques without a clear understanding of how or why they may be effective. With a conscious knowledge of theories, teachers can make more clearly informed decisions regarding how and why their literacy instruction is choreographed. The better that educators understand the variety of theories and models that can be applied to literacy learning situations, the more effectively they can design and implement high-quality literacy instruction.

For researchers, theories and models provide explanations for research hypotheses, a guide for selecting research variables, and a framework for discussing research findings. Furthermore, theories provide the link for understanding connections between research studies. Research studies are used to support, refute, prove, and disprove theories. Theories are essential for research publication. Just as there is no single correct theory or model for practitioners, there is no single correct theory or model for a researcher. The use of multiple theoretical lenses for examining the reading process, reading instruction, and reading research is presented as historically recent and ideal.

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the general definition of a theory?

- Are people aware of the theories that they possess?

- How is the term “theory” used in the field of education?

- Why are theories important to educational practice?

- Why are theories important to educational research?

- How do theories compare with models?

- What are the advantages of being able to consider life experiences, including those related to the field of reading, from multiple theoretical perspectives?

ACTIVITIES

Alpha Boxes. Alpha Boxes is a postreading strategy that can be used to enhance readers' comprehension of text. As presented by L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2007), readers are asked to create a list of concepts, examples, strategies, and/or connections from the assigned reading (e.g., the present chapter) that correspond to each letter of the alphabet. L'Allier and Elish-Piper write: "Because learners must identify at least one idea related to each letter of the alphabet, they are required to move beyond the first few thoughts that pop into their heads to those that require deeper thinking, revisiting the text, and connecting to prior knowledge and experience to the text" (p. 339). Readers' responses to the Alpha Boxes exercise for Chapter 1 can be shared in small groups or with the whole class.

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