How Secondary English Language Arts Teachers Determine, Select, and Plan Using Complex Text

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ABSTRACT

HOW SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS DETERMINE, SELECT, AND PLAN USING COMPLEX TEXT

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Northern Illinois University, 2020
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This study examined how secondary English language arts teachers determine, select, and plan how to use complex text. Another aim was to detail what resources and instructional activities they found successful in assisting students with diverse, academic, and sociocultural needs. Finally, this study shows the need for additional resources and scaffolding currently absent in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The conceptual framework for this study was based on the RAND™ reading comprehension model.

The descriptive design employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants included secondary-level ELA teachers from the Denver Public Schools system. The teachers took a survey, and then seven of them were chosen to complete a think-aloud protocol to gain a deeper understanding of what criteria they considered prior to selection of text for instruction, how they determined the text complexity of instructional materials, and how they utilized that information to plan tasks and instruction. After the think-aloud, each of the seven teachers participated in a semi-structured interview to reflect on how and why they chose text and instructional materials.

Two major themes emerged from the collected data. Text as a consideration for instructional planning was the more significant theme. The teachers all noted that determining a
text’s complexity is not an easy task, even though there are many tools available to help them with this process. They considered the importance of vocabulary during the instructional planning phase of teaching complex text and used scaffolding and graphic organizers rather than isolated worksheets, when teaching a piece of complex text. The second major theme was differentiation. The majority of the teachers noted that using cooperative learning strategies and purposeful grouping kept the students engaged and better able to grapple with the complex text and increase engagement.

The study yielded two significant insights: 1) The accessibility of texts 2) importance of scaffolding complex text for student success. Recommendations are included for secondary English language arts teachers, and professional development suggestions for secondary ELA teachers.
HOW SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS DETERMINE, SELECT,
AND PLAN FOR USING COMPLEX TEXT

BY

APRIL HUGHES
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my father, who passed away in January before he got to see me finish.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The underperformance by secondary-level students on standardized measures of academic performance has ignited a debate about the most efficient way to bolster academic literacy in the content areas (Fang & Coatoam, 2013). According to the 2019 Nation’s Report Card, the overall average reading score of eighth-grade students declined by three points in comparison to the previous assessment in 2017 (National Assessment for Education Progress [NAEP], 2019). Even as far back as 10 years ago, data from the Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy (2010) found that over two-thirds of students in middle and high school struggled with reading and writing texts in the academic content.

Furthermore, although college and career workplace texts have increased in difficulty over the past two decades, the complexity of text utilized at the secondary level has remained stagnant (Hank, 2012). As a result, students graduating from high school are often inadequately prepared to comprehend the material they encounter in college, career, or workplace (ACT, 2006; Cappiello & Dawes, 2015; Cunningham & Mesmer, 2014; Goldman & Lee, 2014; Hank, 2012; Sheehan, Kostin, Napolitano, & Flor, 2014; Williamson, 2006). Currently, there exists a lack of empirical research that focuses on how secondary-level teachers make decisions about text selection (Allington, 2009; Doubek & Cooper, 2007; Williamson, Fitzgerald, & Stenner, 2013). Gaining a better understanding of the text selection process and the challenges teachers face will
enable stakeholders (i.e., parents, building/district-level administration, states) to provide educators with needed professional development and resources to enhance decision making and instruction for secondary-level students. Therefore, the study sought to provide insight into approaches for selecting and utilizing complex text in secondary-level ELA classrooms.

Prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the majority of states’ standards did not focus on text complexity (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). According to Shanahan (2013), many schools and districts had standards that focused on cognitive reading skills with an emphasis on matching readers to text. Advocates of implementing CCSS argued that the current literacy protocol “ultimately denies students the very language, information, and modes of thought they need most to move up and on” (Adams, 2011, p. 6). On the contrary, the CCSS called for teachers to build students’ reading abilities by increasing text complexity in English language arts (ELA), history, science, and technical subjects (Capiello & Dawes, 2015; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010a).

In fact, CCSS Reading Standard 10 and College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standard 10 state that students need to “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a p. 10). Accordingly, students should be able to analyze, manipulate, or separate textual elements of words, syntax, or discourses (e.g., word frequency, sentence length, number of pronouns, cohesive device, genre markers) that can impact the meaning of the text (Mesmer, Cunningham, & Hiebert, 2012). Equally important is the fact that the CCSS increased Lexile ranges for grade bands. This increase is documented in Appendix B¹ of the CCSS. Appendix B incorporates “text exemplars

¹ For more information, see Appendix B of the CCSS.
that are supplemented by brief performance tasks that further clarify the meaning of the Standards and illustrate specifically the application of the Standards to texts of sufficient complexity, quality, and range” (NGA & CCSSO, Appendix B, 2010). The publication of Appendix B resulted in teachers selecting curriculum to meet the new Lexile ranges (CCSSO, 2010b). For example, in the 9-10 grade bank, the pre-CCSS Lexile band was 960-1115; however, the new Lexile band was changed to 1080-1305 (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b). Hence, the creators of the CCSS created materials to help teachers transition into the CCSS. Appendix A of the CCSS is one such document.

Appendix A of the CCSS contains research supporting the key elements of the standards and a glossary of key terms teachers can utilize as a resource to help them transition into the CCSS. Appendix A provides teachers with standards that show the “quantitative trajectory for text complexity that had grade-by-grade specifications for increased text complexity in successive years of schooling” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 4). Moreover, Appendix A provides a qualitative component using a text exemplar that reminds teachers about the importance of taking the text’s levels of meaning, structure, language, and knowledge demands into consideration (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 11). The qualitative and quantitative trajectory the authors of the CCSS provided does not take into consideration students with a wide array of reading levels or from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds (Goldman & Lee, 2014). Also, the CCSS fails to take into consideration genre distinctions, social contexts, and interactions that occur between the reader and the text (Goldman & Lee, 2014; Valencia et al., 2014). Providing teachers with a quantitative trajectory for text complexity will not suffice when teachers have to consider the background knowledge students need to comprehend certain text structures,

2 For more information, see Appendix A of the CCSS.
disciplinary content, and the disciplinary-inquiry process (Goldman & Lee, 2014). For example, students who are analyzing a piece of American literature within the quantitative trajectory must first be able to cite thorough evidence and draw inferences before completing an analysis of the text.

A focus on text complexity alone will not close the reading comprehension gap of secondary-level students. The attention needs to move to students’ reading comprehension of texts, and when that occurs, the emphasis moves away from the text to “examination of the interaction between reader, text, and task factors within particular contexts” (Valencia et al., 2014, p. 295). In fact, Valencia et al. contend that when students are taught how to read a variety of complex texts, they experience increased reading comprehension in conjunction with the literary, cultural, and disciplinary knowledge that facilitates reading comprehension.

Problem Statement

Since implementation of the CCSS in 2010, teachers have been directed to use a myriad of increasingly complex texts to prepare students for the college and career path of their choice. Decisions about texts and activities related to text can have far-reaching consequences regarding skill development and secondary students’ attitudes toward reading (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Therefore, it is critical that secondary-level ELA English language arts (ELA) teachers have a clear understanding of how to select complex texts and design activities for students that meet their academic and sociocultural needs. However, the call for increased text complexity has become a challenge for teachers, schools, and organizations around the country. One challenge is that ELA teachers overly focus on text, which has subsequently resulted in a lack of consideration regarding the importance of the reader and the task (Cunningham & Mesmer,
2014; Goldman & Lee, 2014; Valencia et al., 2014). A second challenge includes teachers expanding the array of texts students are exposed to by advancements in technology (Cunningham & Mesmer, 2014; Goldman & Lee, 2014; Valencia et al., 2014). For example, interacting with texts on the internet, digital e-readers, smartphones, and tablets can provide different challenges.

Defining text in the era of advanced technology is also a challenge. Historically, experts in the field (i.e., Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Gee, 2004; Kress, 2003; Luke, 2003 New London Group, 1996) have contended that definitions of literacy and text need to be expanded (Moje, Stockdill, Kim, & Kim, 2011). For example, Kress (2003) argues that text can be “the result of the social semiotic action of representation” (p. 84) and can be multimodal (audio, visual, aural, gesture, alphabet letters, etc.) and delivered in a variety of media forms (the internet, TV, video, etc.) (Moje et al.; 2011). Furthermore, teachers can help students by expanding the range of texts they expose them to by building bridges between students’ out-of-school and in-school literacy knowledge (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). In addition, Schoenbach et al. recommend that teachers need to expose students to a variety of multimodal texts if they want to bridge this gap. Therefore, equipping students with strategies to grapple with these different texts will empower students to persevere when faced with text they view as boring or too difficult.

In fact, the process of text selection should be embedded in the demands of the task(s) for which the texts are being chosen (Goldman & Lee, 2014). However, many teachers lack the skills and knowledge to create instructional practices that increase students’ reading comprehension of complex texts (Goldman & Lee, 2014). To date, there has been a body of literature published on suggestions for selecting text at the elementary level (Galda, Sipe, Liang,
& Cullinan, 2013; Graves, Juel, Galda, & Dewitz, 2010; McGill-Franzen, 2009; Rush Ash, Saunders, Holschuh, & Ford, 2011; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Also, a great deal of research had been published on the type of texts secondary-level English language arts teachers have been assigning and using in their classes (Applebee, 1989; 1993; Squire & Applebee, 1968; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006; Stotsky, 2010). Little research, however, exists on how secondary-level ELA teachers make text decisions and activity task choices at the secondary level (Doubek & Cooper, 2007; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to study secondary-level ELA teachers’ selection of complex text and their determination of the task and instructional strategies to develop in-depth reading comprehension.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What kinds of text do secondary-level ELA teachers select for instruction? Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process? If so, how?

2. How do ELA secondary-level teachers determine text complexity for instructional materials to develop in-depth reading comprehension?

3. What tasks and instructional strategies do secondary-level ELA teachers use to support student learning from text?

Conceptual Framework

According to the Reading Study Group (2002), “In fall 1999, the Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) asked RAND to examine how OERI might improve the quality and relevance of the education research it funds” (p. #1).
RAND Corporation is a nonprofit organization that focuses on research solutions to public policy challenges to help make the world a safer and better place. Therefore, the Rand Reading Study Group (RRSG) was delegated the task of developing a research framework to address the most pressing issues in literacy. The conceptual framework for this study was based on the RAND™ model of reading comprehension. According to RRSG, reading comprehension is defined as

> the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. Text comprehension was a vigorous, interactive process that occurs between the readers, the text, the reading activity (i.e. purpose), and the broader socio-cultural context for reading. (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 11; see also Best, Rowe, Ozuru, & McNamara, 2005; Stanovich, West & Harrison, 1995; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001)

The RRSG identified four primary elements that need to be present for students to interact with the comprehension process: reader, text, activity, and a sociocultural context. Although Figure 1 shows each of these elements separately, the RRSG stresses the importance of the factors being interrelated (Griffiths, Sohlberg, & Biancarosa, 2011).
Figure 1: The RAND model of reading comprehension (Rand Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 12).

The reader portion of Figure 1 refers to the individual skills readers bring to the comprehension process. These skills include, but are not limited to, reading and cognitive skills as well as psychosocial and biological factors (Griffiths et al., 2011). Text genre, level of text, font, graphics, and organization are some of the factors represented in the text component of Figure 1. Activity refers to the reader’s purposes and goals. According to the RRSG (2002), the influence of the reader, text, and activity elements vary across the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading phases. In Figure 1, the sociocultural context refers to the environment and setting in which the reading comprehension takes place. Factors, including economic resources, class membership, ethnicity, neighborhood, and school culture, can be seen in oral language practices, in students’ self-concepts, in the types of literacy activities in which individuals engage, in instructional history, and of course in the likelihood of successful outcomes. (p. 17)
The four areas of the RAND reading model are important factors that need to be taken into consideration as secondary-level ELA teachers select texts and tasks for their students.

Predating the RAND model of reading comprehension, Moje’s (2000) research identified that teachers’ practices were impacted by students’ beliefs, values, and views of the subject matter. Alexander and Jetton (2000) also highlighted the role of different types of knowledge needed to navigate domain-specific texts. They also found students’ interest level and understanding influenced their use of strategies when encountering domain-specific texts. Moje’s and Alexander and Jetton’s research established that text, task, and activity are directly linked to improving students’ reading comprehension, as are the sociocultural contexts, disciplinary domains, and knowledge necessary for comprehension. As articulated in the RAND reading model (RAND Reading Group Study, 2002), once teachers gain a fundamental understanding of the reading comprehension process, they can begin to investigate text complexity. Specifically, CCSS Anchor 10 plays into that process (Valencia et al., 2014). The following discussion illustrates how the RAND reading model fills the gaps that are lacking in the CCSS.

**RAND Reading Study Group’s Influence of the CCSS**

To support the reader and task dimensions of text complexity of the CCSS, the authors used research by the RAND Reading Group Study. For example, the authors used research from the 2002 report titled *Reading for Understanding* to guide their development of the reader and task dimensions of text complexity (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). However, the authors of CCSS fell short of what the report suggested regarding the reader and task dimensions of text complexity. While the RAND model of reading comprehension considers the complexity of reading comprehension and the diversity of the reader, the CCSS provide generalized guidelines and
directions that fail to take into consideration the multitude of factors that contribute to the complexity of the reading process. For example, the CCSS does not address the classroom learning environment (such as organizational grouping, the inclusion of technology, or availability of materials) as being an essential aspect of the “context that can affect the development of comprehension abilities” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 17). Since the CCSS increased the complexity of the grade-level bands, teachers needed to find new texts to meet those new requirements. Unfortunately, not all school districts had sufficient funding to purchase new materials. An unintended consequence produced by lack of funding was that teachers lacked the necessary materials needed to properly implement the new standards. According to Duke (2000), children who attend schools in poor districts have fewer texts available to them than students from affluent school districts do. Also “the availability of texts in homes and libraries varies similarly” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, pp. 25-26).

Furthermore, the CCSS do not address the sociocultural influences that contribute to readers’ comprehension of complex texts. Given the increased cultural and socioeconomic diversity of students in schools across the United States, varying sociocultural contexts have to be considered when selecting text and tasks for students (NAEP, 2019). According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), learning and literacy are viewed as cultural and historical activities because they “represent how a specific cultural group or discourse community interprets the world and transmits the information” (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. 20). For teachers to select appropriately complex texts and tasks, they need to develop an awareness of how members of a particular discourse community construct their identities as readers through their ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, reading, and writing (Gee, 1990).
Teachers need to be aware of the variabilities in readers before creating rigorous lesson plans that include complex texts and activities for students.

Additionally, teachers need to take into consideration multimodal literacy, or a focus on the design of discourse by investigating the contributions of specific semiotic resources, (e.g. language, gesture, images) co-deployed across various modalities (e.g. visual, aural, somatic), as well as their interaction and integration in constructing a coherent multimodal text (such as advertisements, posters, news reports, websites, films). (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 2)

Another aspect the CCSS does not address is the reader’s motivation and engagement. The RRSG (2002) cited Skinner, Wellborn, and Connell’s (1990) research that showed a link to students’ engagement, motivation, and achievement if play were involved in the instructional process. In other words, if students are engaged during the instructional process, their achievement increases. Hence, teaching affects reading comprehension outcomes, and frequent and active engagement leads to understanding complex text (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002).

The RAND model of reading comprehension, in conjunction with the research conducted by Moje (2000) and Alexander and Jetton (2000), provides a complete framework of how teachers need to approach complex text. Different kinds of knowledge are necessary for domain-specific texts, so the subject-area or discipline domain also needs to be factored in with regard to the reader, task, and text framework.

Significance of the Study

One of the expectations the CCSS set for students was an increased ability to comprehend more difficult text in addition to performing tasks with text that are more complex and “require [the ability to] compare and contrast across multiple texts and multiple media” (Goldman & Lee,
The CCSS do not give teachers any direction on how to plan instructional activities using these complex texts. Therefore, teachers need additional resources about how to select complex texts for classroom instruction. Furthermore, teachers need valid protocols for determining the text complexity of instructional materials that will develop in-depth reading comprehension. Finally, teachers will benefit from knowing the types of tasks and instructional strategies secondary ELA teachers use to support student learning from text.

This study aimed to identify approaches taken and strategies used by secondary ELA teachers for addressing text complexity in the classroom. Another aim was to detail what resources they used and instructional activities they found successful in assisting students with diverse academic and sociocultural needs. Finally, this study shows the need for additional resources and scaffolding techniques currently absent in the CCSS.

Methodology

The descriptive design for this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Participants included secondary-level ELA teachers from the Denver Public Schools system. The teachers took a survey, then seven of them were chosen to complete a think-aloud protocol (Ericsson & Simon, 1980) to gain a deeper understanding of what criteria they considered prior to selection of text for instruction, how they determined the text complexity of instructional materials, and how they utilized that information to plan for tasks and instructions. After the think-aloud, each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview to reflect on how and why they chose texts and instructional materials.

The survey data were collected and analyzed using Qualtrics software. The software automatically generated statistics on the frequency of each response (i.e., minimum, maximum,
and mean values of specific responses and the variance and standard deviation of the responses to each question; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). The think-aloud protocols and interviews were transcribed and member-checked to ensure accuracy. Also, the think-aloud and interviews were coded in three cycles. Descriptive coding (Wolcott, 1994) was employed during the first cycle. Next, axial coding (Charmaz, 2006) and frequency counts (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) were utilized. Lastly, the coded transcripts and analytic memos drafted during each cycle were used to develop assertions (Di Domenico, 2014).

Definitions

The following terms were used in the study:

**Close reading** - an investigation of a short piece of text, with multiple interpretations done over numerous instructional lessons; the significance of word choice and syntax and the discovery of different levels of meaning as passages are read numerous times (Brown & Kappes, 2012).

**Coherence** - a characteristic of the reader’s mental representation of the text. Coherence is constructed in the mind of the reader and depends on the skills and knowledge the reader brings to the situation (Graesser, McNamara, Louise, & Cai, 2004).

**Cohesion** - the use of linguistic devices to join sentences together, including conjunctions, reference words, substitution and lexical devices such as repetition of words, collocations and lexical groups (Graesser et al., 2004).

Organization of Dissertation

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the groundwork for the study. It includes the problem, purpose, and conceptual framework. The literature review,
presented in Chapter 2, synthesizes the research related to the problem and conceptual framework for the study. The third chapter details the methods used. The fourth chapter presents the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion of the findings as well as the implications, recommendations, and limitations.
Prior to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) being adopted in 42 out of 50 states in the union, most states’ reading programs focused on cognitive reading skills (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016), with no emphasis on including complex text in the reading repertoire of secondary-level students. Therefore, an essential part of the CCSS Literacy Standards includes increasing reading levels for students in Grades K-12. This literature review examines the history of text complexity, traces a review of how teachers can use the elements of text complexity to increase secondary-level students’ literacy scores, and a discusses literature related to the conceptual framework for this study. Finally, the literature review addresses the need for additional research.

Review of the CCSS

Anchor Standard 10 (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10) states that students will be able to “read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 10). Due to the difficulties of analyzing the quantitative measures of texts in kindergarten and first grade, the Lexile ranges for Anchor 10 do not increase until second grade (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b). The reading level increases at the start of second grade and then again for each grade level through twelfth grade (NGA & CCSS, 2010b). Table 1 displays the original plan by the developers of the CCSS.
### Table 1

Original Scale: Increased Lexile Ranges for Anchor Standard 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Previous Lexile Range</th>
<th>CCSS Expected Lexile Range (2010)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>450-725</td>
<td>450-790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>645-845</td>
<td>770-980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>860-1010</td>
<td>955-1155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>960-1115</td>
<td>1080-1305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>1070-1220</td>
<td>1215-1355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (2012, p. 8).

Even though teachers utilize many different ways to level texts, Appendix A of the CCSS only references Lexile levels to determine appropriate levels of complex text by grade level (Harris, 2016). In 2014, MetaMetrics provided a wide array of texts that aligned to the CCSS expectations, and per the CCSS, these ranges were referred to as “Lexile bands,” similar to the verbiage used in the CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 10). The NGA and the CCSSO provided two resources to help teachers implement Anchor 10 regarding independently and proficiently reading and comprehending complex literary and informational texts (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 10). The first is the scale shown in Table 1, and the second is Appendix B of the CCSS document, which provides a list of exemplar texts teachers can employ in conjunction with their professional knowledge to select books for students and instruction (Harris, 2016).

In 2012, the NGA and CCSSO released *Supplemental Information for Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy: New Research on Text Complexity*. Feedback on the original scale from states, school districts, and teachers produced a
revised scale for quantitative measures that widens the range of each band at both the top and bottom of each grade level and provides additional overlap (NGA & CCSSO, 2012) to offer teachers more flexibility with students who have a diverse range of ability levels (Harris, 2016).

The teachers received supplemental information when CCSS were implemented in the form of Appendix A, which provided the Lexile framework for leveling text (NGA & CCSSO, 2012).

Teachers’ deconstruction and implementation of Anchor Standard 10 influence students’ literary experiences as well as how much their reading abilities increase.

### Historical Review of Text Complexity

Historically, readability was considered synonymous with text complexity. However, they are not the same, and each adds a different dimension to literacy. The term “readability,” which has been in the research arena since the late 19th century, produced numerous readability formulas that established the first leveling systems (Hiebert, TextProject, & University of California, 2011) to give teachers a way to determine the complexity of texts (Hiebert, 2012a; Klare, 1984). According to Hiebert and Pearson (2014), literary analyst L.A. Sherman and linguist Nikolai Rubakin (first developed the tools for systematically analyzing, predicting, and intentionally controlling text complexity in written communication. The tools were solely qualitative in that they focused on types of text features that could influence the comprehension or readability of texts (e.g., sentence length, vocabulary, syntax). Besides being the first researcher to note a progressive shortening of sentences over time, Sherman’s work set the agenda for reading research in the 20th century (DuBay, 2007). Rubakin’s work in the late 1880s was vital because he found that difficult words and long sentences were the two major
roadblocks to clear communication (Choldin, 1979). Their work was validated throughout the next century of reading research.

The post-WWI era brought about a new interest in the topic of readability. Two significant trends, described by DuBay (2007) in *Unlocking Language: The Classic Readability Studies*, were 1) the increasing number of students who had immigrant parents and 2) measuring education issues scientifically and objectively. Also, the 1921 release of E. L. Thorndike’s *Teacher’s Word Book*, which ranked the 10,000 most common words compiled from 41 different sources, was the first book to provide teachers with an objective way to measure the difficulty of text based on word frequency (DuBay, 2007).

In 1923, Lively and Pressey published the first readability formulas for predicting how likely students of varying levels of reading development would be able to successfully read and comprehend text (Hulden, 2004; Klare, 1984). Their 1923 study, *A Method for Measuring the “Vocabulary Burden” of Textbooks*, investigated ways to measure and reduce the amount of technical vocabulary found in science textbooks (DuBay, 2007). Lively and Pressey employed techniques similar to Thorndike’s; however, they assigned a zero value (ZV) to words that appeared in the sampling but did not appear in Thorndike’s list. These words established the technical vocabulary size. Lively and Pressey created a formula that established the weighted median index, which determined that the higher the median index, the easier the word. Similar to Sherman’s work, Lively and Pressey’s study reiterated that utilizing a statistical approach for predicting text complexity is a viable and valid method (DuBay, 2007).

Five years later, in 1928, Vogel and Washburne published the first study of the structural characteristics of texts. Their study created an objective way for authors to measure their writing
against students’ abilities and interests. The researchers utilized their earlier research, *The Winnetka Graded Book List*, to validate their Winnetka formula (DuBay, 2007).

Readability took a new direction from student to adult education in the 1930s. Waples and Tyler (1931) conducted a two-year study that focused on adult reading interests. This study highlighted the type of materials adults were reading and what they wanted to read. The study illustrated a lack of appropriate reading materials for adults and suggested that certain materials were too complicated for adults to read (DuBay, 2007).

Motivated to look for alternatives to Thorndike’s formulas, Dale and Tyler (1934) developed the first adult readability formula from 74 selections taken from magazines, newspapers, and children’s health textbooks. Dale and Tyler’s study had very different results than Thorndike’s because it showed that adults need only 10 factors for comprehension, whereas Thorndike’s results showed that children need 29 (Dale & Tyler, 1934). Dale and Tyler combined three of the 10 factors to construct a formula that would predict the proportion of adult readers who would have success with the reading material (DuBay, 2007). Dale and Tyler’s study produced a readability formula that remains uncontested.

In 1944, Thorndike, with Irving Lorge, published his last book, *The Teacher’s Word Book of 30,000 Words* (DuBay, 2007). Lorge later developed his formula, the Lorge Index, to simplify the readability formula for children’s works. However, researchers also used it for adult texts (DuBay, 2007). The Lorge Index simplified the task of matching reader to task by grading text materials and passage simplification (Lorge, 1944). The Lorge Index remained the standard criteria for readability formulas for the next two decades.

From the end of World War I to the end of World War II, a plethora of reading research and readability formulas were published, although some studies and formulas proved more
reliable than others. For example, the readability formula developed by Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall in 1948 has proved the most consistent. The Dale-Chall formula utilizes a list of 3,000 easy words and requires counting the hard words – i.e., those not on the list (DuBay, 2007). The Dale-Chall formula produced not only a formula that was easy to use but also a formula that had high reliability. However, there are many challenges posed by readability formulas, and teachers cannot use them in isolation when implementing Anchor Standard 10 of the CCSS (Hiebert, 2012a).

**First Dimension of Text Complexity: Quantitative Measures**

Quantitative measures, the first of three dimensions used to measure text complexity, relies heavily on readability formulas. Several comprehension researchers who employ different approaches to reading comprehension have recommended students and reading material match so they can gain meaning from the text and continue growing as readers (Adams, 2009; Clay, 1979; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Mesmer, 2005; Moje, 2000; Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). Historically, educators have utilized readability formulas to determine the complexity of a text. However, recently there has been much debate regarding text difficulty versus text complexity.

Mesmer et al. (2012) define text difficulty by the expected performance of many students on tasks associated with the text and defines text complexity as the element within the text that is manipulated and studied (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). However, teachers should use text difficulty as only one variable to measure text complexity. Mesmer et al. (2012) stress the importance of understanding how text complexity, text features, characteristics of the reader, and the requirements of the task interact (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016).
Appendix A of the CCSS defines quantitative dimensions of text complexity as the following:

Those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion that are difficult, if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus today typically measured by computer software. (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 4)

The supplemental information published in the CCSS in 2012 suggests teachers should begin with quantitative measures to identify appropriate texts to use with students while teaching the text complexity standards. Regardless of the content area or standard taught, teachers need to know how to become proficient in evaluating all texts for complexity to meet the needs of all students.

Traditionally, a two-step process to determine the appropriate match between the complexity of the material and the ability of the reader is employed (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). The first step is evaluation of the written materials with a readability formula that assigns a level equivalent or developmental scale score (i.e., Lexile; Williamson, Fitzgerald, & Stenner, 2013) to each text, primarily based on the length of frequency of its constituent words and how complicated the sentences are (Chall & Dale, 1995). The next step involves assessing students with either a formal or informal reading comprehension instrument that gives an instructional level, grade-level equivalent, or Lexile score (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). Teachers then use this score to match students to text at their appropriate instructional level.

According to Graesser et al. (2004), “Cohesion is a characteristic of the text, whereas coherence is a characteristic of the reader’s mental representation of the text content” (p. 193). Reed and Kershaw-Herrera (2016) contend that the quantitative indexes of cohesion are “rooted in psycholinguistics and evaluate the Lexile, semantic, and syntactic features” (p. 77) a reader
can exercise to articulate a mental depiction of the information (McNamara, 2010). Research shows that passages with low cohesion are more challenging for readers of varying ages and ability levels (Beck et al., 1984; Cataldo & Oakhill, 2000; Linderholm et al., 2000; Loxterman et al., 1994). To determine text complexity, teachers can utilize causal cohesion, which can be a stronger predictor when evaluating informational text (McNamara et al., 2010; Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016).

Several studies on sixth-grade students reading informational text showed that students struggle with comprehension and recalling causal information compared with information presented in other structures, such as listing, sequence, or compare/contrast (Hare, Rabinowitz, & Schieble, 1989; Penning & Raphael, 1991; Richgels, McGee, Lomax, & Sherd, 1987). If causal connectors are not present in the text, students will find the informational text more difficult to comprehend (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). Readability formulas and readability indicators are research based and reliable, but they do fail. For example, Benjamin (2011) cautions that the validity of utilizing these may be questionable because a readability formula could determine that a nonsense passage, a passage that has no meaning, is readable if the passage has short words repeated in short sentences. Furthermore, a quantitative research study conducted by Nelson, Perfetti, Liben, and Liben (2012) investigated the abilities of Lexile, Degrees of Reading Power, Advantage/Touchestone Applied Science Associates Open Standard (ATOS), SourceRater and the Pearson Reading Maturity Metrics to calculate levels of text difficulty (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). The researchers used multiple texts from the list of exemplars in Appendix B of the CCSS, passages from Stanford Achievement Test 9 (SAT9), passages from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, and passages from the MetaMetrics Oasis platform. The results of the study showed that the metrics used to measure text complexity were
reliable and correlated with the grade-level measure of text complexity; there was a higher correlation for informational texts than narrative (Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). As a result, the researchers suggested that teachers should employ additional qualitative measures when making instructional decisions to determine text complexity because relying only on quantitative measures does not consider the themes and content of texts (Nelson et al., 2012; Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016).

**Second Dimension of Text Complexity: Qualitative Measures**

The second dimension used to determine text complexity is qualitative measures. The CCSS utilizes qualitative measures in addition to quantitative measures to determine text complexity. Appendix A of the CCSS defines qualitative dimensions of text complexity as “those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measured by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose; structure; language conventionality and clarity; and knowledge demands” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 4). Teachers need to use their professional knowledge and experience when employing qualitative measures to determine text complexity. However, teachers need to use qualitative measures in conjunction with quantitative measures because there are too many factors for quantitative measures to be used alone (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b).

Teachers need to consider multiple aspects of the text to determine its complexity and consider a plethora of guidelines designed to help teachers make decisions about literature and informational text (Galda, Sipe, Liang, & Cullinan, 2013; Graves, Juel, Galda, & Dewitz, 2010; Rush, Ash, Saunders, Holschuh, & Ford, 2011), including help with pairing readers to texts in the elementary grades (McGill-Franzen, 2009). However, few studies are available on how to
guide teachers at the secondary level (Goldman & Lee, 2014; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015; Williamson et al., 2013). Furthermore, teachers face severe time constraints that beg the question: When are teachers putting these qualitative measures into practice? (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

Surveys conducted on teacher practices in text selection have shed some light on how English language arts teachers assign text in classrooms (Applebee, 1989; Squire & Applebee, 1968; Stallworth, 1997; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stotsky, 2010). According to Fisher and Frey (2013), qualitative evaluation requires “considering a text across four dimensions: levels of meaning and purpose, structure, language convention and clarity, and knowledge demands” (p. 8). Fisher and Frey (2013) contend that any given text can be more or less complicated in any of these areas; however, it is unlikely that a text would be difficult in all four areas. Teachers can use a guide (Table 2) to help them when making instructional decisions.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>ASPECTS</th>
<th>WHEN A TEXT IS COMPLEX….</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels of Meaning and Purpose</td>
<td>● Density and complexity</td>
<td>Many ideas come at the reader, or there are multiple levels of meaning, some of which are not clearly stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Figurative Language</td>
<td>The reader is not familiar with literary devices (e.g., metaphors, personification)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Purpose</td>
<td>The purpose is not stated or purposefully withheld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>● Genre</td>
<td>Genre is unfamiliar to the reader, or the author bends the rules of the genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Organization</td>
<td>The traditional structure is not followed, such as problem/solution, cause/effect, compare/contrast/sequence or chronology, and rich descriptors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Narration</td>
<td>The narrator changes or is unreliable throughout the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table continued on next page

Table cont. from previous page

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Features</th>
<th>Fewer signposts such as headings, bold words, margin notes, font changes, or footnotes used.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphics</td>
<td>Visual information in the text does not repeat itself, but the graphics and illustrations are essential to understanding the main idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Conventionality and Clarity</td>
<td>Variations of standard English, such as regional dialects or vernaculars that the reader is not familiar with, are included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register</td>
<td>It is archaic, formal, scholarly, or fixed in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Demands</td>
<td>The reader does not have the personal life experiences necessary to understand the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>The demands of the reader extend well beyond what he or she had been formally taught in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Knowledge</td>
<td>The demands on the reader extend well beyond his or her cultural experiences and may include references to archaic or historical cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Vocabulary is domain-specific and not easily understood using context clues or morphological knowledge, or the reader is unfamiliar with the complex ideas represented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Fisher and Frey (2013, p. 9).

The text structure is another qualitative dimension of text complexity the CCSS include in the definition of text complexity. Text structure refers to the organization of the text, the genre of the text, the point of view presented in the text, and the use of text features such as graphics (Harris, 2016). As Table 2 illustrates, texts that have unconventional structures and use literary devices such as symbolism, figurative language, and flashbacks are more complex than texts that do not contain these features. For example, Bakken and Whedon (2002) asserted that narrative
text structures are more accessible for students to comprehend than informational text are. Students often have more experience with narrative texts and, therefore, find them more manageable. There is also a pattern of the beginning, middle, and end in the modern Western and European narratives (Harris, 2016). Bakken and Whedon did find that the organization of text influences students’ ability to comprehend.

Kobayashi (2002) investigated text organization and its impact on reading comprehension assessment for 18- to 19-year-old students. In the study, 750 students used texts with varied formats and organization. Kobayashi’s results showed having texts with a clear structure benefited students who were proficient readers, but the level of text organization had no impact on less proficient readers’ scores. In other words, struggling readers’ assessment scores were not improved or impacted whether or not the text had a definitive text structure. Kobayashi recommended that further research be conducted on the effects of text organization on English language learners. Kobayashi’s study showed statistically significant evidence that text structure can influence students’ reading comprehension, but the study did not investigate students at the middle school or elementary levels. Further research on whether similar results with students of various grade levels needs to take place.

Syntactic complexity is not included in the definition provided in Anchor 10 of the CCSS. A study conducted by Franz, Starr, and Bailey (2015) suggests that syntactic complexity is a significant component of a text and is an essential dimension of the text complexity model. Franz et al. called for additional research and consideration on the syntax used in academic language and texts. TextEvaluator, an online measurement tool for text complexity, uses academic vocabulary and syntactic complexity in the formula (Sheehan et al., 2014). This online measurement tool can quickly produce data to plan for instruction.
Furthermore, Pearson and Hiebert (2014) recommend that utilizing useful qualitative rubrics could help teachers match texts to readers and provide information about texts that allow teachers to plan instructional scaffolding to support students while reading texts of greater complexity. The supplemental information in Appendix A of the CCSS recommends that teachers should utilize quantitative dimensions with the grade bands, followed by qualitative dimensions and professional judgment, to match the reader to specific text and tasks (NGA & CCSSO, 2012).

In 2013, the Student Achievement Partners (SAP), founded by several lead writers of the CCSS, released qualitative rubrics to measure the qualitative dimension of informational texts and literary texts; however, little research exists on the effectiveness or validity of the rubrics (Dipardo, Storms, & Selland, 2011). One recommendation made by Hiebert (2013) is that teachers utilize a Text Complexity Multi-Index (TCMI) as they determine the appropriateness of texts for readers. The TCMI process uses quantitative information, qualitative benchmark texts, rubrics, and evaluation of the readers’ tasks in the context in which the learning will occur (Hiebert, 2013). This four-step process can be beneficial for teachers when considering the dimensions of text complexity as outlined in the CCSS. Further research needs to determine teachers’ perspectives of the qualitative dimensions, how time consuming this type of qualitative analysis is, and whether it is feasible for teachers to manage.

Third Dimension of Text Complexity: Reader and Task Factors

The third dimension used to define text complexity are the reader and task factors. Appendix A of the CCSS defines the reader and task dimensions of text complexity as the following:
Consideration of variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and particular tasks (such as purpose in the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Such assessments by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of the students and the subject. (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 4)

A reader’s motivation, experience, and prior knowledge are all factors that influence the reader’s knowledge on a given topic (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b). Factors that affect the reading task include the purpose of the task, how difficult the task is for the student, and the types of questions asked of the student (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b). Appendix A of the CCSS provides explicit directions for teachers to determine text complexity as well as descriptions and examples for measuring qualitative dimensions of text complexity; however, it provides limited directions for reader and task considerations.

The first two dimensions of text complexity are about the text itself. However, the third dimension, matching the reader to text and task, is where the teaching takes place (Fisher & Frey, 2013). According to Fisher and Frey, there are concerns from the education world that the CCSS represent “a retreat to a rigid approach of text explication and objective analysis that marked secondary education in the mid-20th century” (pp.10-11). On the other hand, Rosenblatt’s (2003) research on reader-response theory has shed light on other perspectives, including critical literacy (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004) and multicultural theory (Banks & Banks, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2013).

The RRSG (2002) contends that teachers need a critical understanding of the variables the reader brings to the classroom to help in complex text deconstruction. Students’ motivation and social development are critical components when designing literary activities and when considering appropriate texts for readers (Gaskins & Labbo, 2007). Cromley and Azevedo
(2007) investigated the ways students’ background knowledge, vocabulary, ability to make inferences, and ability to use reading strategies influence their reading comprehension. Their results showed that students’ background knowledge and vocabulary development had the most significant impact on reading comprehension skills. Cromley and Azevedo recommended that teachers who are working with struggling students should provide interventions that focus on vocabulary and building background knowledge.

Unfortunately, a teacher can be well versed in designing and implementing tasks for complex texts and still struggle with increasing students’ reading comprehension because of sociocultural contexts. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) assert the importance of activity setting in influencing students’ acquisition of knowledge (and literacy). Tharp and Gallimore describe these activity settings as the identity of the participants, how the activity is defined or executed, the timing of the activity, where it occurs, why students should participate in the activity, and what the motivation for the activity is (RRSG, 2002). These five factors that affect reading comprehension can be both economic and cultural. Furthermore, the Reading Study Group (2002) emphasizes that

the effects of contextual factors, including economic resources, class membership, ethnicity, neighborhood, and school culture, can be seen in oral language practices, in students’ self-concepts, in the types of literacy activities in which individuals engage, in instructional history, and, of course, in the likelihood of successful outcomes. (p. 39)

Therefore, teachers’ strategic creation of a classroom learning environment that has embedded scaffolding and differentiation to increase students’ comprehension of complex texts is critical.

To implement the CCSS effectively, the NGO and CCSSO (2010b) give teachers a framework for utilizing the qualitative, quantitative, and reader/task dimensions. While the standards provide information on the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of text complexity, they fail
to provide sufficient information to guide instructional decisions on reader tasks and texts. Determining appropriate texts and tasks for readers is a complicated process that requires more than professional development (Cappiello & Dawes, 2015; RRSG, 2002). As stated earlier, teachers face contextual factors that provide challenges not overcome by professional development alone.

The importance of teachers considering contextual factors is illustrated in Northrop and Kelly’s 2018 study. The study focused on how student tracking influences teachers’ instructional practices and text selection. This study worked with eighth-grade teachers and examined how they vary their curriculum and instruction in response to students’ track levels. For instance, the students placed in the low-track classes spent a large portion of class working on reading skills and strategies, unlike the students in the high-track classes. The students in the high-track classes spent the majority of class working on literature analysis and comprehension instruction. Furthermore, the study showed that students in the low-track classes “read less challenging text than their counterparts in grade-level and high-track courses” (Northrop & Kelly, 2018).

Essentially, teachers utilized higher order thinking skills and texts with their high-track classes yet employed more remedial strategies and lower level texts with their low-track classes. Therefore, low-track students were not offered the same or equitable curricula as their high-track counterparts.

Factors That Make Literature Complex

Experts in the field of literacy continuously debate what counts as text. To explain the role text plays in literature, Moje et al.’s (2011) broad definition is utilized: “What counts as the text is dependent on the social and cultural situation in which the text is offered, taken up, and
interpreted, and that views of text may change from one context or domain to another” (p. 455). Naturally, in the 21st century the role of text in literature would not be complete unless the “variety of modes (audio, visual, aural, gesture, alphabet letters, etc.) and the diversity of media (the Internet, TV, video, etc.) were included” (p. 455; see also Kress, 2003). Lastly, teachers need to recognize the role “that visual, performed, and spoken texts” apply to reading literature (Moje et al., 2011, p. 455). When students read literature through a disciplinary lens, knowledge about text structures, mode, media, and genre is required for students to maximize their comprehension of the text (Chambliss, 1995; Goldman, 1997; Goldman & Varma, 1995; McNamara & Kintsch, 1996; Moje et al., 2011).

Research has shown that in English classrooms, teachers tend to engage in a participatory approach that allows them to attract students by using an array of texts for a myriad of purposes (Moje et al., 2011). For example, teachers may use a specific text for “augmenting investigations, offering alternative viewpoints, expressing ideas in unique ways, or communicating understanding and findings of inquiry” (p. 455). Teachers can select text from their literature textbooks and supplement it with canonical works, young adult literature pieces, poetry, and/or informational texts depending on the purpose of the activity.

Furthermore, due to pre-adolescents’ and adolescents’ emotional, cognitive, and psychological transformation they must be provided with opportunities to interact with rich literary texts that allow critical reflection on their own life experiences (Hall, Sosa, Levine, Lee, & Goldman, 2016). Teachers need to identify and utilize texts that focus on life experiences with which students would be grappling and include characters who wrestled with making sense of oppressive conditions not of their making and who experience support that enables them to be resilient and to learn lessons about an adult world that they would soon enter. (p. 5)
These texts also need to provide multiple opportunities for the students to engage in literary devices that enable them to analyze the text from a variety of perspectives.

To move students from novice readers to expert readers, students need to acquire an abundance of schemata (Levine & Horton, 2015). According to Rabinowitz (1987), experts’ literary schemata can include anticipating that “authors-- purposefully or not-- make frequent use of common literary moves” (p. 126). In other words, certain words, phrases, and features are more significant than others when constructing meaning of the literature. Levine and Horton (2015) exemplify this with the example of J.K. Rowling’s choice of character names such as Severus Snape. Students who employ a richer literary schema will notice the subtle nuances of these details while novice readers will struggle to make the connections.

To read literature successfully, Smagorinsky (2015) contends that students have to respond to the “textual codes or reading ‘the world’ through the metaphor of a ‘text’ that authors use” (p. 144). Furthermore, Smagorinsky argues that reading is a constructive act requiring not only the decoding of texts but also encoding meaning of the text based on previous experiences. Students benefit from the “reconstruction of textual meaning through a different semiotic system, or trans-mediation” (Suhor, 1984) to analytically interpret work concerning the texts (Smagorinsky, 2015).

Students need discriminant knowledge to employ and decipher different types of texts, which is exemplified in Jonathan Swift’s satire A Modest Proposal (Smagorinsky, 2015). In this case, Swift’s satire uses argumentation to illustrate the problem of England’s families having an inadequate supply of food and a glut of children. Swift concludes that the English can solve both problems by having the wealthy eat the young of the poor. Consequently, without the competency to “understand irony and satiric devices,” a reader might take Swift’s suggestion
seriously or entirely miss the intended theme (p. 144). Therefore, there is a need for teachers to explicitly teach the techniques of satire—exaggeration or understatement, irony—for students to be able to understand Swift’s point of view.

The syntax is a set of conventions for organizing symbols, words, and phrases into structures (Raney, 2009). For example, long noun phrases, nominalizations, passive voice, and embedded clauses are all examples of syntax. Syntactical structures prove difficult for students who read complex literature because when they ascend into higher levels of content, they need more precise tools and increased knowledge of how words work within discipline-specific registers (Goodwin & Perkins, 2015; Nippold & Sun, 2008). For instance, the language of Shakespeare proves difficult for students because of its syntax, use of pronouns, and vocabulary, which are not part of contemporary English. Case in point, in Act II, Scene iii, Line 1 of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare uses “yonder,” “thou,” and “vestal livery.” Therefore, teachers will have to allocate time during the reading for students to question Shakespeare and determine the meaning of the sentence (Lee & Spratley, 2010). Teachers can scaffold this difficult text by allowing students to discuss Act II, Scene iii, in small groups to learn through an “in-context experience”—by listening to the conversation, questioning their classmates, and participating in the discussion” (Langer, 2001, p. 134).

Additionally, teachers can create “difficulty questions” to guide students’ deciphering of the texts as “appropriate at the whole-discourse and sentence levels” (Petrosky, McConachie, & Mihalakis, 2010, p. 141). An example from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* illustrates a seven-clause sentence: “As the years passed, released from school thirty minutes before Jem, who had to stay until three o’clock, I ran by the Radley Place as fast as I could, not stopping until I reached the safety of our front porch.” Fang and Schleppegrell (2008) suggest that teachers can
help students develop the ability to conquer such complex syntax by fostering tasks such as syntactic anatomy and integration.

Nominalization, a common feature of academic and scientific texts, is the expression as a noun or noun phrase of meanings typically expressed as a verb, adjective, or whole clause (Fang, 2012b; Martin, 1991; Wineburg, 1991). Nominalization plays a very different role in literature than in other academic texts (Fang, 2012a). In literature, writers use nominalizations to insert judgment, which allows the writer to elicit an emotional response from the reader. Additionally, nominalization uses a wealth of literary devices that create a visualization, or vivid images, for the reader (Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox, 2006). Students do not encounter this type of language in everyday conversation; however, authors of literature include it because the language is essential for creating “the setting, events, and participants’ feelings in the story” (Fang et al., 2006, p. 257).

Summary

Numerous research studies conducted show the effectiveness of readability formulas (Dale-Chall, 1948; Dale & Tyler, 1934; Lively & Pressey, 1923; Lorge, 1944). However, readability formulas alone are not enough for teachers to determine text complexity, and the debate continues whether text complexity has increased, decreased, or remained consistent (Gamson, Lu, & Eckert, 2013; Hayes, Wolfer, & Wolfe, 1996; Reed & Kershaw-Herrera, 2016). Therefore, ELA teachers must use the three-pronged approach the CCSS recommends when determining text complexity and matching readers to the texts and tasks (NGO & CCSSO, 2010b). Even though the CCSS is an essential resource for teachers, it does not go far enough for teachers to implement Anchor 10 effectively. States and school districts must provide teachers
with organized professional development opportunities to improve their knowledge of the CCSS (Kober & Renter, 2012).

While the CCSS includes appendices that provide book lists and Lexile levels, the standards fall short in providing information on how to select tasks and texts in the grade bands. Seven years after CCSS implementation, secondary-level ELA classroom teachers are still struggling with this. Being able to provide teachers with research-based tasks that accompany complex texts will ensure that students are increasing their reading comprehension while climbing the text complexity staircase.

Also, the CCSS fall short of providing teachers of struggling readers with enough resources to implement the standards. Shanahan (2013) recommends that teachers use instructional support to help frustrated students read complex texts. However, there is a lack of research that explores ELA teachers’ experiences with text complexity and how they make decisions on complex texts and tasks for readers in secondary classrooms. Increasing teachers’ ability to select appropriate tasks for complex text and appropriately match readers to the text will enable them to close the achievement gap.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the type of protocols teachers use for determining the text complexity of instructional materials that will develop in-depth reading comprehension. Additionally, the study investigated the types of tasks and instructional strategies secondary ELA teachers use to support student learning from text. Another aim was to detail what resources they use and instructional activities they find successful for assisting students with diverse, academic, and sociocultural needs.

The CCSS does not give teachers any direction on how to plan instructional activities using complex texts. Therefore, teachers need additional resources on how to select complex texts for classroom instruction. Furthermore, teachers need valid protocols for determining the text complexity of instructional materials that will develop in-depth reading comprehension. Finally, teachers would benefit from knowing the types of tasks and instructional strategies secondary ELA teachers use to support student learning from text. This chapter is organized into the following sections: Research Design, Researcher Positionality, Participants and Sampling, Data Collection, and Data Analysis.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What kinds of text do secondary-level ELA teachers select for instruction? Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process? If so, how?

2. How do ELA secondary-level teachers determine text complexity for instructional materials to develop in-depth reading comprehension?
What tasks and instructional strategies do secondary-level ELA teachers use to support student learning from text?

Research Design

The study used a descriptive design. According to the *Handbook of Research for Educational Communication and Technology*, “Descriptive studies have an important role in educational research. They have greatly increased our knowledge about what happens in schools” (Association for Educational Communications & Technology, 2020). Descriptive research does not fit into the definition of either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies, but instead it can utilize elements of both, often within the same study. Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). In addition, Borg and Gall (1989) classify the outcomes of educational research into the four categories of description, prediction, improvement, and explanation. Descriptive research describes natural or man-made educational phenomena of interest to policy makers and educators; therefore, it was a good fit for my study (Association for Educational Communications & Technology, 2020).

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilizing a survey to answer the first two research questions. Then a qualitative approach was employed to explore the third research question. More specifically, think-aloud and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain more in-depth insight into how secondary-level ELA teachers chose texts and tasks/instructional strategies to support student learning.
According to Fisher (2009), “Bracketing typically refers to an investigator’s identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study’s data (p. 583). Bracketing allows the researcher to acknowledge any biases that might pertain to the study. I was a colleague and fellow teacher of half of the participants who took part in the think-aloud and semi-structured interviews. The other half of the participants worked in the same school district and taught the same curriculum, but they were not my colleagues. My experience as a secondary-level ELA teacher and a reading specialist for 17 years has shaped my outlook on determining text complexity, selecting complex text, and designing tasks for instructional use. As a reading specialist and teacher, I frequently found that Lexile levels and text topics did not always align with what the curriculum or book company said the Lexile level was. For example, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins is listed on Scholastic.com as having an 810 Lexile level and for grades 7-12. If a teacher were simply going by that Lexile number and aligning that to what the CCSS stated as rigorous text, the Lexile level would be too low for grades 7-12. However, having taught this novel several times, I know that the content of the book is not appropriate for lower grade levels. Therefore, I often found myself disagreeing with the CCSS. These experiences have all shaped my biases regarding the topic of complex text.

Due to these beliefs, the research and results could be influenced. By using different validation strategies, including member checking, peer reviewers, and multiple data sources, I minimized the conflicts of interest to ensure the integrity of the study. My role as a researcher was to listen to the teachers during their think-aloud and not influence their curricular decisions.
Participants and Sampling

For the study, the targeted population included certified secondary teachers, Grades 6-12, who taught English language arts. These teachers were from the Denver Public Schools because they were readily available to the researcher. Convenience sampling was employed, allowing all available members of the population to participate (Patton, 2002). The Denver Public Schools currently employ approximately 4,329 teachers; however, only half teach at the secondary level (n=2,125) and only 335 are English language arts teachers. Collectively, the secondary-level teachers who volunteered for this part of the study had over a century of teaching experience. All but one taught at the middle school. Additionally, all but one taught in a school with a 50-99% population of Hispanic, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or two or more races. They had all participated in approximately 11 hours of district-level professional development about teaching text complexity and CCSS delivered by their department chair (collected from interviews).

The ELA teachers at the middle and high schools were contacted to participate in the study using several procedures. First, a description of the research study, along with a link to the survey, was posted on each Denver public school’s Schoology English website (see Appendix A). Second, I utilized the Colorado Education Association (CEA) to send an email to all of its members, inviting those who fit the criteria to participate (see Appendix B). The CEA also sent a follow-up email to remind members about the study (see Appendix C). In addition, survey participants were provided with a consent form at the beginning of the survey that included the purpose of the study and the researcher’s contact information (see Appendix D). At the end of the survey, participants were given an opportunity to provide their information if they wanted to
participate in the second phase of the research (see Appendix E). The survey participants who indicated they would like to further participate in the study were contacted by phone (see Appendix F). The efforts were used to recruit ELA teachers resulted in eight agreeing to participate in the think-aloud and semi-structured interviews and 72 completing the survey. The secondary ELA teachers who agreed to participate in the think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interviews were provided with a description of the purpose of the study, a promise of confidentiality, and the consent to participate form with permission to be audiotaped (see Appendix G). Table 3 captures the teacher participants’ information.

Table 3
Teacher Participant Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Total Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Percentage of Hispanic, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Two or More Races in Their School</th>
<th>Professional Development in Text Complexity &amp; CCSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>28 years</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>18 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>12 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the eight participants was chosen for the pilot study; therefore, only seven teachers participated in the actual think-aloud semi-structured interview part of the study. All participants signed the consent form in person before the think-aloud and the semi-structured
interviews took place (see Appendix G). To ensure the confidentiality of each participant, they were given a pseudonym, and each participant was informed that IRB approval had been secured. Also, each participant of the think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interview was provided with a $25 Amazon gift card to compensate them for their time. The Amazon gift cards were funded by the researcher. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted before the implementation of the instrument pilots and data collection (see Appendix H). In addition, a Continuing Review Approval Notice was secured on April 1, 2020 (see Appendix I).

Data Collection

The following sections describe the three tools used to collect the data for this study. First, it describes the survey instrument development and then the instrument’s pilot procedures. Finally, it covers the survey, think-aloud protocol, and semi-structured interviews. Table 4 illustrates how the data collection methods were used to answer each research question.

Table 4
Alignment of Research Questions with Data Collection Instruments/Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Think-Aloud</th>
<th>Semi-Structured Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What kinds of text do secondary-level ELA teachers select for instruction? Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process? If so, how?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do ELA secondary-level teachers determine text complexity for materials utilized for classroom instruction activities to develop in-depth reading comprehension?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What tasks and instructional strategies do secondary- level ELA teachers use to support student learning from text?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Development

The survey instrument used for this study was developed from two primary sources: 1) the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers High School Literature Survey and 2) the Navigating the Text Selection Gauntlet Survey (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Both surveys were based on research using factors teachers reported as affecting their decisions regarding complex text (Applebee, 1989, 1993; Friese, Alvermann, Parkes, & Rexak, 2008; Jipson & Paley, 1991; Squire & Applebee, 1968; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stotsky, 2010). In addition, both were originally designed for English language arts teachers in grades 9-12. Permission to utilize the surveys for this study was granted via email by the creators of the surveys (see Appendix J).

To better target both middle and high school ELA teachers, I was allowed to rephrase some of the survey items. For example, in Watkins & Ostenson’s (2015) survey, they asked teachers to indicate how much autonomy they felt in decisions about texts and then asked about the level at which these decisions were made. In the survey for this study, I asked, “What level of autonomy in decision making about text do you feel you have?” and then I followed up with, “How much do district/curriculum requirements influence your decisions about text?”

The first survey questions were adapted from the Literary Study in Grades 9, 10, and 11: a national survey conducted by Stotsky (2010) from Forum: A Publication of the ALSCW (see Appendix K). The study was co-sponsored by the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, the Concord Review, and the California Reading and Literature Project. The purpose of the survey was to develop an accurate picture of what was taught in these grades across the country and to recommend ways to provide the nation’s English teachers with useful resources for teaching a strong 21st-century English curriculum (Stotsky, 2010). The 2008-2009 survey was
taken by 400 Arkansas public school English teachers for Grades 9, 10, and 11. For the ALSCW National High School Literature Survey, the same questions were used, and 1,500 teachers were randomly selected from the Quality Education Data (QED) database. A total of 406 teachers from across the country responded to the survey. The data collected for the Arkansas survey mirrored the data from the ALSCW national survey.

Participants were randomly selected and invited to participate in the 67-question survey via email. Ten background questions were included to gather demographic information. The multiple-choice questions explored whether the “broad middle” of Arkansas students were assigned more difficult complex works progressively from year to year so their reading skills would be developed to be college and career ready (Stotsky, 2010, p. 8). Participants were given two ways to complete the survey: online or phone interview. The survey took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Additionally, some questions for the study were adapted from Watkins and Ostenson’s (2015; see Appendix L) survey project with 339 secondary teachers. Their original survey, lasting approximately 30 minutes, sought to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced teachers’ decisions about instructional texts in the English classroom, which paralleled the focus of this study. Watkins and Ostenson’s items were partially based on Stotsky’s (2010) research that examined the factors specific to decisions about the text (e.g., length, genre, quality, ease of access) through 68 questions that included multiple-choice items, sliding-scale responses, and open-ended responses. For example, in the multiple-choice questions, teachers were provided titles for specific novels, plays, and books to select the titles they assign to their students. Table 5 depicts an example.
The survey utilized in this study (see Appendix M) sought to expand the research by going beyond high school grades to include middle school grades. The survey featured multiple-choice, sliding-scale, and open-ended questions. The first group of survey questions solicited demographic information about the participants, including how long they had been teaching (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). The second group of questions asked participants about the criteria or factors they consider before selecting specific texts for instruction. The third group of questions asked participants to identify how they determine the complexity of a text and how they utilize the information to plan for instruction. The survey also included items on the challenges teachers face when selecting text for English language arts classroom instruction.
Pilot Study

Pilot Survey

Pilot testing was administered to increase the validity and reliability of the survey employed for the current study. Mertens (2014) suggests that the pilot sample should be similar to the population of the study’s participants. The pilot sample came from a convenience sample of secondary teachers who worked in the same school as the researcher. The goal for the pilot was to send a link to the survey to 25 teachers, with the expectation of at least a 70% response rate. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), a response rate of around 70% is acceptable as long as the respondents and non-respondents are similar. Out of the 25 emails, nine participated in the survey, yielding a 40% response rate.

Pilot participants were asked to take the survey and provide feedback. Several strategies were applied during the pilot testing phase to enhance the quality of the questions (Desimone, 2006; Mertens, 2014). The pilot participants were encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and offer suggestions for questions that were unclear. A section was also included at the end to provide participants with the opportunity to add questions they thought needed to be included in the survey (Mertens, 2014). An item analysis was also conducted to determine internal consistency (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was run in the Qualtrics software with a score of .88. In addition, the use of Qualtric’s Expert Review, a digital reviewer for surveys to determine that the survey collected data of the highest quality, indicated the survey needed to be shortened. Therefore, five questions were removed to reduce the length.
Pilot Think-Aloud and Semi-Structured Interview

One teacher, who was excluded from the study, was selected to pilot the think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interview question. The teacher was a 12th-grade English language arts teacher who had been teaching for five years. That teacher was a colleague of the researcher and readily available. The pilot was conducted after school in the teacher’s classroom. The pilot was audiotaped and transcribed to review for possible revisions. During the think-aloud protocol, the teacher did not need to use any of the prompt cards. However, she did offer suggestions regarding when to use them in future think-alouds. During the semi-structured pilot interview, the participant answered all the questions but asked some clarifying questions. After the interview, she provided feedback that some of the questions were too long and needed clarification. The pilot participants’ suggestions were considered and revisions made.

Survey for the Study

The survey was the primary tool by which quantitative data were collected during the initial stages of the study. Since data were collected from a large number of people, using a survey was the right choice (Mertens, 2014). However, surveys are reliant on individuals’ self-reports of knowledge and behaviors, so validity was contingent on the respondents’ honesty when responding. The survey allowed information to be collected on the criteria teachers utilize to select text and to determine text complexity for classroom instruction.

Qualtrics software was used to distribute and collect the data from the survey. Respondents were able to take the survey on their mobile device, tablet, or computer. According to Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014), the rise in mobile devices should prompt the researcher
to consider offering surveys designed to accommodate smaller devices (e.g., phone, tablet). A multi-dimensional approach was used to communicate to survey participants throughout the implementation process (Dillman et al., 2014). In other words, the survey participants received communication via mail, email, and social media and through an app to meet all the needs of the participants.

The email sent out by the Colorado Education Association notified potential participants that the survey window would be open for 30 days (Appendix B). A reminder email (Appendix C) was sent out a week later to invite teachers who had not completed the survey to participate (Dillman et al., 2014). All the participants who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for three $25.00 Amazon gift cards. Completed survey participants were randomly drawn when the survey window closed. Appendix N shows a crosswalk between the survey questions and the research questions.

**Think-Aloud Protocol and Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Study**

To capture the type of knowledge teachers rely on when planning for instruction, a think-aloud protocol (see Appendix O) was employed to simplify teachers’ thinking during lesson construction. Ericsson and Simon (1980) conclude that even if their view of thought processes was necessarily incomplete, verbal reports such as those from think-aloud data are a “thoroughly reliable” source of information about thought processes (p. 247). To obtain the most accurate data from the think-aloud, I started with a pre-task activity to warm-up the participants. Gibson (1997) suggested a pre-task orientation session that briefly explains the rationale and form of think-aloud research to reduce “cold start effect” (p. 58). However, modeling and prompting were not used as part of the pre-task activity. Gibson cautions that modeling might introduce bias
to “think-aloud reporting” (p. 58). Furthermore, prompting can interfere with the validity of the think-aloud protocol. The protocol employed for the study was designed to ask teachers to engage in a think-aloud as he or she planned a unit for instruction in which complex text needed to be selected and implemented and students had to complete a task.

At the outset of the study, participants were told the researcher was interested in talking to them about how they planned a unit that incorporated one or more pieces of complex text. This included the selection process, how the unit was implemented, and the tasks that accompanied the piece of complex text. Additionally, I defined what was meant by a piece of complex text and what was meant by a task. Then participants were asked if they had any questions before proceeding. Participants were told they would be recorded while planning aloud all the components of a lesson or unit that used complex text. During the think-aloud protocol, participants were in their classrooms to ensure they had access to their curriculum and planning materials. The participants were told ahead of time to have their materials prepared for their lesson on complex text. The researcher started each think-aloud by describing the procedure to the participants and asking if they had any questions about the process. Furthermore, I acknowledged this process might seem unnatural at first, but it gets easier as the process moves forward. Teachers thought out loud as they processed all the materials in the unit (Wolfe & Goldman, 2005). In addition, during the think-aloud, the researcher’s role was to observe each participant’s nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues are just as important to note as verbal cues during a think-aloud protocol. According to Fontana and Frey (2000), researchers need to notice not only the participants’ choice of verbal language and terminology but also their nonverbal communication, including “pace of speech, body movement…and variations in vocal tone and volume” (pp. 660-661). During each think-aloud if the researcher noticed the participant’s body
language indicated frustration, or when there was at least 90 seconds without the teacher sharing a thought, a “Share your thinking” card was placed in from of them to remind them to share their thoughts (Didomenico, 2014).

After the think-aloud was completed, the teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, which took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. According to Hess-Biber (2014), there is a continuum of types of interviews, from formal to informal, that encompasses varying types of structures. In addition, Mertens (2014) suggests using open-ended questions because they allow “the respondent’s concerns and interests to surface, providing a broader lens for the researcher’s gaze” (p. 384). Therefore, the interviews were kept casual with a list of questions; however, the researcher was open to “follow leads from the respondent to determine the ordering of questions and the use of probes to further explore relevant points” (Mertens, 2014, p. 385). Appendix P is the list of questions asked during the interviews.

Both the think-aloud protocol and the semi-structured interviews were audio recorded. According to Nunan (1992), audiorecording during a think-aloud will keep the participant’s behavior as natural as possible. All interviews were audiorecorded for transcription. The digital audio was sent to a transcriptionist, and I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. After each think-aloud and interview were completed and transcribed, a copy was given to each interviewee for member checking to ensure validity. Participants were given two weeks to provide feedback, clarification, look for omissions, and/or make changes. There were no requests to make additions or changes by the participants.
Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures of the survey, semi-structured interview, and think-aloud protocol are described in the following sections.

Survey

The multiple-choice items on the survey were analyzed using Qualtrics software. The software automatically generates statistics on the frequency of each response to the item, including the descriptive statistics: the minimum, maximum, and mean values of specific responses and the variance and standard deviation of the responses to each item (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Additionally, the averages and standard deviation were computed for the Likert-style questions. For the multiple-choice questions that were not ranked, analysis was on the frequency of choice. Data were reported by the percentage of teachers who selected the item. Therefore, the findings were purely descriptive with no statistical inference possible. There were 129 people who started the survey, but only 76 finished. Surveys that were not completed were eliminated from the data set.

Cross-tabulations for nuanced data were also analyzed utilizing the Qualtrics software. A cross-tabulation was generated for Survey Question 7: “Which of the following types of text do you use for instruction in your classroom?” and Survey Question 16: “Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process?” Then data were structured into a graph on the Qualtrics software.
Think-Aloud and Semi-structured Interviews

Transcription was used to analyze the data that emerged from the interviews. Transcribing research data was “interactive and engaged the reader in the process of deep listening, analysis, and interpretation” (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 347; see also Mertens, 2014). After the transcriptions were completed, I provided the participants with a copy to check for accuracy. No revisions were necessary. After the data were transcribed, coding took place in two phases.

As Mertens (2014) explains, individual words and lines, segments, and incidents were coded in the initial phase. To form meaningful questions and record thoughts, memoing was conducted by recording my thoughts (Mertens, 2014). To simplify the process, I kept the codes precise and straightforward and constructed short codes to move through the data quickly (Charmaz, 2006).

Phase II, focused coding, was an essential step because it allowed me to gain a more accurate picture of what the data were painting. During the focused coding stage, “initial codes were tested against the more extensive body of data to determine how resilient the codes were in the bigger picture that emerged from the analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 440). Charmaz describes focused coding as “using the most significant and frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data” (p. 57).

After the coding was complete, data were analyzed through winnowing. Winnowing the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) is a process of focusing on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it. Winnowing allowed me to aggregate the data, which allowed themes to emerge. In qualitative research, the process is to aggregate data into a smaller number
of themes, with the goal being five to seven themes (Creswell, 2013). In the case of this research, two major themes emerged. The first theme had seven subthemes, and the second theme had one. A subcode had to be substantiated at least five times from the aggregate dataset to be a subtheme. That benchmark established a consistent and systematic way to analyze the data when identifying the subthemes.

Finally, peer review was conducted to review codes and themes and offer feedback on the codes and emergent themes. Lastly, triangulation was employed to make interpretations and draw conclusions about the data. Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that triangulation should be used to point out the differences and make a note of them rather than gloss over them. During the triangulation phase, the survey data, think-aloud protocol, and semi-structured interviews were analyzed for differences. According to Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), the goal of triangulation should be to highlight the diversity in the data. After triangulating the data, two major themes emerged: instructional planning and differentiation. The triangulation also showed the emergence of seven subthemes for instructional planning and one subtheme for differentiation.

Summary

This chapter presented the research questions, the research design, and a description of the participants as well as the sampling procedures and techniques, instrumentation, and data collection/analysis procedures. Chapter 4 will present the results of the data.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study had two purposes. First, it aimed to identify approaches secondary ELA teachers employed when selecting a piece of complex text for use in the classroom. Another aim was to identify the instructional activities they found successful for helping students with diverse academic and sociocultural needs. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What kinds of text do secondary-level ELA teachers select for instruction? Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process? If so, how?
2. How do ELA secondary-level teachers determine text complexity for materials utilized for classroom instruction activities to develop in-depth reading comprehension?
3. What tasks and instructional strategies do secondary level ELA teachers use to support student learning from text?

The results are presented in this chapter. The chapter begins with a description of the teacher participants followed by the findings for the first theme, instructional planning. Next, the second theme, differentiation, is reported to show how the teachers worked to support all levels of learners in their classrooms from non-and low-level readers to IEP/504, ELL, and GT students.
Survey Participants

A total of 76 teachers from urban and suburban middle and high schools took the survey. The size of the schools the participants taught in varied. For instance, 27% of the survey participants taught in schools that had 500 or fewer students. Furthermore, 36% taught in schools that had 500 to 1,000 students, 20% taught in schools that had 1,000 to 1,500 students, and finally, 17% taught in schools with a student population of 1,500 to 2,500 students. There were 66 females and 10 males who took the survey. Their levels of education and years of experience are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Survey Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Bachelor’s</th>
<th>Master’s</th>
<th>More Than One Master’s Degree</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>16-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21-24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Participants for Think-Aloud and Semi-Structured Interviews

Seven secondary English language arts teachers also participated in the think-aloud and interview portions of the study. The following are descriptions of the participants.
Lucy was in her 12th year of teaching middle school. She was teaching sixth grade at a middle school with a diverse socio-economic population (i.e., 60% of the students received free or reduced lunch). In total, she had spent 7 of her 12 years teaching ELLs, which was evident during her interview by her attention to vocabulary and background knowledge when planning. Lucy’s method of planning appeared unorganized and, at times, hard to follow. She tended to be overwhelmed during the think-aloud protocol and frequently took time to regroup. She described that she utilized practical techniques when modeling annotation while reading complex text. For example, she explained:

*I read through the chunk of text in front of the document camera while I show students how I annotate the text, showing them my reaction to what I read, the comments that I make, and the responses to the text. After annotating the text, I show them how I can answer those text-dependent questions. I can go back and look at what I annotated and used that to help me answer the questions.* (Lucy, Interview, October 23, 2018)

Lucy’s example of modeling was mainly utilization of the think-aloud approach. She did not use that particular phrasing, but she described the think-aloud process. According to Fisher and Frey (2015), modeling and using a think-aloud protocol to teach complex text are both valid approaches, so regardless of the scattered thought process demonstrated in her think-aloud protocol, Lucy’s methods of teaching were pragmatic.

Given her background working with ELLs, Lucy paid close attention to vocabulary. She utilized various methods to pre-teach the vocabulary for a piece of complex text. She explained that she found utilizing pictures with the vocabulary was an effective strategy for her students. She went on to share another useful technique:
I use the online game Quizlet and create flashcards before teaching a piece of complex text. I will make the flashcards, and I will have a picture if I can provide one because a picture is way better than a written definition. (Lucy, Interview, October 23, 2018)

Lucy claimed that her use of online media and integrating pictures with vocabulary demonstrated her ability to reach students of all levels in her classroom. Regardless of specific strategies that targeted ELL/IEP students, her example illustrated that all students benefit from the use of multiple strategies when interacting with complex text and vocabulary. Frontloading vocabulary before teaching complex text was also a common theme among the other participants in the study.

### Madison

Madison was in her 14\textsuperscript{th} year of teaching sixth-grade language arts. Her students were diverse in both ability and demographics. Approximately 60\% of her students were Hispanic, and English was not their first language. The other 40\% identified as White students with professional/working parents. Madison’s quiet and reflective demeanor came through in how she thoughtfully answered questions and shared ideas.

Before this school year, she had taught fifth grade for six years. She noted that the transition back to middle school had been challenging and taxing. She had taught in the same district for 10 years and noted that the shift away from using a textbook made developing tasks for students difficult. She expressed her frustration with the implementation of the CCSS:

I think the most significant change is that I feel like before that [CCSS], the way the district made the units of study or with the old version of units of study, there were….Like when I taught middle school before, there was at least a textbook to go to. Not that we were told we had to use the textbook, but it was at least there, and there was a copy for every kid. (Madison, Interview, October 8, 2018)
Madison was the only teacher who expressed missing the use of a textbook. In her case, the freedom to select any text that aligned to the CCSS made text selection more difficult and frustrating. She contended that she would rather have a more scripted outline of which texts she should be teaching the students. However, her insecurities about the lack of a textbook did not deter her from thoroughly previewing texts and creating thoughtful and rigorous tasks.

Like several of the other teachers, Madison described her lack of professional development on how to slowly release students to comprehend complex text as an obstacle. She noted that the district’s focus on CCSS and teaching to a standard did not align with the realities of teaching complex text. She contended the standards cannot be taught in isolation:

If you look at the standard around close reading, I mean it is a standard, but that does not mean that it is just one skill. It is quite complex... Right? There are many skills there, and teaching to a standard does not feel authentic to me. (Madison, Interview, October 8, 2018)

Madison’s questioning of herself and looking for affirmation about her beliefs are evident in this statement. However, her lack of confidence is questionable because she expressed valid questions about the CCSS and the expectations that accompany them. Her inability to fully embrace the CCSS, along with her thoughtful and contemplative nature, illustrates there might be more than one way to teach complex text successfully.

Cindy

Cindy was a veteran teacher in her 28th year of teaching. She had worked at the same middle school her entire career and shared that she was looking forward to retiring from teaching in the next three years. Cindy also reported seeing many trends come and go in her career. Her flexibility and ability to adapt were apparent in her knowledge of curriculum and technology.
Cindy’s students were predominantly White with parents who had professional positions. She was currently teaching seventh grade and had two honors classes and three regular classes. Her school defined honors classes as those with a curriculum at least two grade levels above the students’ grade level. For that reason, she was expected to teach high school curricula to middle school students. She struggled to ensure her honors students were challenged and pushed enough to prepare them for top-tier universities.

Cindy’s enthusiasm for and dedication to her students were visible through her passionate interview and think-aloud sessions. During time purposely set aside for her professional learning community (PLC), she and her colleagues worked diligently to select diverse complex text. Cindy explained this process:

So as a team we work together really closely in the PLC group, and we’ve really been working on trying to focus more on different text sets and trying to expand our repertoire, so to speak, so we’re not so focused on White males in our literature, so looking at more diverse literature but also what the kids are interested in. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

Cindy expressed that the implementation of the CCSS made her teaching more purposeful, yet she expressed disappointment in not being able to show a whole book because she loved it and contended that it made students love literature. She said, “This has been one of the negative impacts of the CCSS” (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018). She said she has noticed students’ love of literature has declined with the increasing demands of informational text required by CCSS. When asked about teaching excerpts versus an entire novel, Cindy explained:

I have been struggling with just pulling pieces of texts. I have this in my head that we need to read the whole thing. I know other teachers have been trained to do it, but I do not like the idea of ‘just read this part, just read this chunk. I do not want my students to get the gist of something, I want them to love it. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)
This statement juxtaposes Cindy’s beliefs with that of the newer teachers interviewed. It also revealed a belief that can only come with decades of teaching and the wisdom of learning what works best in the classroom. She implied that the newer teachers are trained like robots to do what the curriculum states and explained that it may not always result in students developing a passion for lifelong learning.

Erin

Erin was a veteran teacher with 21 years of experience. Over those two decades, she taught both middle and high school. Currently, she was teaching seventh grade at a school with a racially and socioeconomic diverse student population in which approximately 95% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. During her think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interview, her low energy levels revealed her feelings of disenchantment with teaching. She explained how difficult it was for students reading three to four levels below their current grade to follow along.

Despite Erin’s lack of enthusiasm for teaching scripted material, her ideas for extending the curriculum to include this project seemed to excite her, but the mandatory timelines given by the district were her top priority during her preparation. She articulated that getting off of the mandatory schedule negatively impacted her evaluations. She said, “It behooves me to finish the unit in approximately 30-33 days” (Erin, Interview, November 1, 2018). This tight timeline brought into question what the priorities of the curriculum are if teachers are only allotted a month to introduce the material and students only have one month to interact with and comprehend an entire unit of complex text.
Ella

Ella was in her fourth year of teaching eighth-grade language arts in the public school system. She is a well-spoken and dedicated young teacher currently working on her Master’s in reading. The knowledge she had gained from her graduate program was evident in her interview and think-aloud protocol. Ella used an innovative approach to identify the appropriate reading tasks and instructional strategies students needed to best support their learning. She explained that once students’ reading levels are determined, she will

   color code my seating charts based on my students’ reading level. I move my chart around to have students of similar reading ability in the same group because then I give level texts. I am a big fan of Newsela because I can change the level to meet students’ needs. (Ella, Interview, September 21, 2018)

Ella said she used a multitude of diverse reading strategies in her classroom. She also reported having a high number of English language learners (ELL) who required considerable scaffolding with complex text. The school’s population was 75% Hispanic, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or two or more races, with the remaining students identifying as White. Ella said that she thought frontloading for complex text was essential because “I have students from Mexico, China, and India in my classroom who do not have a lot of background knowledge” (Ella, Interview, September 21, 2018).

Cara

For 15 years, Cara had been teaching eighth-grade English language arts in the same school district. Her passion for reading and students was evident throughout the study. Cara’s deep classroom experience was evident in the number of strategies she incorporated into the reading and writing process with her students. She also reported seeing a dramatic change in the
demographics of her students, especially over the last five years. Her classes had shifted from mostly White students to a population with a 50% increase in Hispanic, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or two or more races and students who speak more than one language.

Cara was not always familiar with the terms or names of the strategies she used in the classroom, yet she spoke of ones that were research based and effective. When teaching complex text, she described one of her favorite techniques:

I loved doing ‘Quiz, Quiz, Trade,’” which is one of my favorite teaching techniques. To reinforce either some vocabulary or some of the ‘Read Like a Reader, Read Like a Writer’ teachings, you would put things in the ‘Quiz, Quiz, Trade’ sheets and the kids hear it, and they are teaching it to each other. It is a beautiful thing. (Cara, Interview, October 25, 2018)

This quotation illustrates Cara’s dedication to teaching students to apply metacognitive thinking independently, which is a skill necessary for deconstructing complex text. This also shows how she incorporated disciplinary reading into her curriculum as a tool to comprehend complex text.

Patrick

Patrick was the only male participant in the think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interviews. For the past 10 years, he had taught 10th-grade English in the public school system. The building in which he taught had a student population that was 99% Hispanic, Asian, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or two or more races and were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Patrick’s classroom demeanor conveyed his passion and dedication for his students who had persevered through a multitude of hardships. He expressed his frustration with the lack of equal opportunities for his students as compared to their White peers because of a lack of cultural understanding and systemic racism. He reported that a
majority of his students were reading two to three grades below grade level, yet he was required to utilize the district’s 10th-grade curriculum. Patrick noted that when he created tasks and selected instructional strategies that would support student learning for the text he had “to take into account the cultural signifiers and language background. I also try and consider reading level and text complexity” (Patrick, Interview, June 21, 2018). Patrick articulated that even though his students were reading below grade level, he was not deterred from maintaining high expectations. When asked about his text and task selection process, he explained:

I do not provide different texts for students, but I have different questions. I also cut out specific paragraphs or chapters, especially when it comes to more complex text like Shakespeare. I may give them a summary or excerpts over the chapters that I take out. (Patrick, Interview, June 21, 2018)

Patrick also expressed the importance of having his students read grade-level texts in the standardized world of ACT/SAT. He pointed out that “the SAT/ACT is not going to level down their texts for my students” (Patrick, Interview, June 21, 2018).

Findings

To gather the teachers’ insights about the selection of, planning for, and strategies they used to teach complex text, I utilized three data collection strategies, which yielded 76 survey responses, seven think-aloud protocols, and seven semi-structured interviews. Table 7 presents the two major themes that resulted from the synthesized data: text as a consideration for planning instruction and differentiation.
For this study, text as a consideration for instruction was defined as the ability of the teachers to visualize and forecast into the future the what, why, and how of the teaching-learning process (Cappiello & Dawes, 2015). This first theme was substantiated by 228 qualitative comments from the survey questions, teacher interviews, and think-aloud sessions. The most common comment involved selecting the type of text for instruction, which included determining the text and vocabulary complexities. This theme had a total of 183 comments from Survey Questions 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 39, and 40 as well as the interviews and think-aloud protocols.

Typically, the first step in instructional planning is for the teacher to determine precisely what it is they want the students to know. This enables teachers to have a specific focus when planning instruction. Thus, Survey Question 22 asked, “Do you determine what you want students to learn (learning outcome) from the text before using it in class? Figure 2 depicts how teachers responded to this question.
Table 7

Major Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th># of Comments or Responses</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text as a consideration for planning instruction</td>
<td>Selecting the type of text for instruction, which includes determining the text and vocabulary complexity</td>
<td>The ability of the teacher to visualize and forecast into the future the what, why, and how of the teaching-learning process (Cappiello &amp; Dawes, 2015).</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>Survey Q 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, Interviews, and Think-Aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Creating tasks to support all levels of learners in the classroom from non-and-low level readers, IEP/504, ELL, and GT students</td>
<td>Differentiation includes tiering or offering students tasks appropriate to their reading and speaking expertise (Tomlinson &amp; Cunningham, 2003; Wormeli 2007). Students identified as gifted and talented, students that have accommodations through a 504 plan, students identified as special education, and students that are English Language Learners.</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Survey Q 22, 26, 31, 32, 34, 44, and Interviews, and Think Aloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A large number, 80%, of teachers responded that they always determine what they want students to learn from the text before using it in the classroom. By contrast, 16% responded that they do this most of the time, and only 4% indicated they determine the learning outcome about half the time or sometimes. No one indicated they never determine the learning outcome prior to using it in class. Once the learning outcomes have been decided, the next logical step in instructional planning is to decide which type of texts would best meet the skills outlined in the learning outcomes. Thus, Survey Question 3 asked, “Do you regularly use a textbook or an anthology in your classroom?”

Figure 2: Frequent use of learning outcomes.
To gain a better understanding of the types of texts these secondary level English teachers used in the classroom, Survey Question 3 asked about the use of textbooks. The teachers chose from these Likert responses: always, most of the time, about half the time, sometimes, and never (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Frequency of textbook use in the classroom.](image)

The majority of teachers (61%) reported using a textbook or anthology sometimes or about half of the time, yet, only 19% of teachers responded that they used a textbook or anthology most of the time or always, and 19% never use a textbook or anthology. Only 1% of teachers reported always using a textbook or anthology in their classrooms. More specifically,
Survey Question 4 asked, “Is the textbook or literature anthology that you use aligned to CCSS?” Teachers were asked to indicate yes or no. Figure 4 depicts an overview of the responses.

Figure 4: Is the textbook/anthology aligned to CCSS?

A clear majority of the classroom textbooks or literature anthologies the teachers were using were aligned to the CCSS.

To gain a better understanding of how the majority of texts were selected for use in the classrooms, Survey Question 6 asked, “How are the majority of text selected in your school?” Figure 5 illustrates the different stakeholders who select text for classroom use.
Figure 5: How the majority of texts are selected.

For this survey question, 4% indicated other and were asked to specify how the majority of texts were selected. One answered, “It’s really a collaboration among the entire department, the school administrator, and the district curricular decisions.” Another said, “We have a curriculum map with suggested texts, but some teachers totally ignore it and ‘off-road it’ with their own texts.” Based on the responses, almost 75% of the texts the teachers used were either self-selected or chosen by the department. To gain a better understanding of the level of autonomy the teachers felt they had, Figure 6 depicts data from Survey Question 13.
Survey Question 13 asked, “What level of autonomy in decision making about texts do you feel you have?” Only 6% of teachers responded they felt they had little or no autonomy over decision making on text selection. Based on the data from Survey Questions 6 and 13, on the whole, the teachers felt they had a large amount of autonomy when it came to selecting texts for classroom use.

Survey Question 7 more specifically asked, “Which of the following types of text do you use for instruction in your classroom” and listed 12 text choices. The respondents were able to check all that applied. Figure 7 shows the percentage of time secondary-level teachers used each type of text from most frequent to the least. Novels (69%) were the most frequently selected option, followed by short stories (57%) and informational text (52%). The three selected the least were classroom textbooks (21%), autobiographies (19%), and epic poems (14%).
To gain further information about whether text complexity factored into the teachers’ text selection, a cross-tabulation was conducted. A cross-tabulation was generated from Survey Question 7, “Which of the following types of text do you use for instruction in your classroom?” and Survey Question 16, “Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making process?” Table 8 displays seven types of text the 76 teachers could select in the survey and is disaggregated by how often the teachers took the complexity into consideration prior to selecting the text. Table 8 shows the variety of texts used in secondary English language arts.
Surprisingly, only 2% of teachers indicated they consider the complexity of a novel prior to teaching it. However, 40% indicated that most of the time they selected an epic poem based on length and complexity, with only 27% of teachers considering the complexity of classroom textbooks prior to selection. Primary source documents (59%), essays (55%), and autobiographies (58%) had the highest percentage of teachers indicating they sometimes consider the complexity of the text prior to selection. The percentage of teachers who indicated they never consider the complexity of a text prior to selection ranged from 0 to 19%. However, 19% indicated they never consider the complexity of the text before selecting autobiographies and biographies for instruction, suggesting the autobiographies utilized in the classroom were required texts, so text complexity was not relevant.

Many factors go into determining a text’s complexity, and there are various quantitative and qualitative tools for teachers to utilize when they want to determine a text’s complexity. Yet
not all of these tools were readily available for teachers, and some teachers were not familiar with them.

For example, Appendix A of the CCSS, “describes a three-part model of measuring text complexity based on qualitative and quantitative indices of inherent text difficulty balanced with educators’ professional judgment in matching readers and texts in light of particular tasks” (NGA & CCSO, 2010a, p. 4). Question 15 of the survey was created to determine whether teachers utilized Appendix A as a tool to determine text complexity. Figure 8 shows how the teachers responded.

![Figure 8: Percentage of teachers who utilize CCSS Appendix A.](image)

According to the data, only 11 of the 76 teachers (14%) reported using Appendix A always or most of the time, while 58 of the teachers (77%) indicated they only sometimes or never use Appendix A to determine text selection. That means three quarters of the teachers who
completed the survey rarely or never referred to Appendix A to help them select text for classroom instruction.

Appendix B of the CCSS is another resource for teachers to use in selecting complex text. This includes text exemplars about level complexity and quality to “serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select similar text” (NGA & CCSO, 2010b, p. 2). To help answer Research Question 2, the teachers were asked, “Do you use Appendix B in the Common Core Standards to determine the complexity of a text?” Figure 9 shows how teachers responded to Survey Question 17.

Figure 9: Educators’ use of Appendix B in the CCSS.
The results showed that 35 of the teachers (46%) said they never use Appendix B in the CCSS. In contrast, only 1 (2%) stated they use Appendix B when determining text complexity and fewer than 20% of teachers consistently use Appendix B to determine text complexity.

Three survey questions (40, 41, and 42) asked teachers about their use of specific programs available to determine a text’s complexity. Survey Question 40 asked, “Have you ever used TextEvaluator to determine the dimensions of text complexity for a text?” TextEvaluator was developed by ETS, “a private nonprofit organization devoted to educational measurement and research, primarily through testing.” According to its website, ETS “developed the TextEvaluator tool for [their] own use” (https://www.ets.org/accelerate/ai-portfolio/textevaluator). After they realized how valuable it can be for major stakeholders in education, they made it available to their education and publishing partners. Figure 10 illustrates how teachers responded to using TextEvaluator.

![Use of TextEvaluator](https://www.ets.org/accelerate/ai-portfolio/textevaluator)

Figure 10: Percentage of teachers who used TextEvaluator.
TextEvaluator is not a free program. In fact, to use the program, there is a licensed user fee. An inference can be made that schools did not have a license for this program, since 84% of teachers responded they have never used this program. Only 15% indicated they used the program sometimes, about half the time, or most of the time. No one indicated they always use TextEvaluator when determining the complexity of a piece of text.

Similarly, Survey Question 41 asked, “Have you ever used the Coh-Matrix-derived TextEasability System to determine text complexity?” According to the Coh-Matrix website, “The TextEasability Assessor provides percentile scores on five characteristics of text, including narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion” (http://cohmetrix.memphis.edu/cohmetrixhome/documentation_indices.html). Educators can use this tool for free online, but it limits text to 1,000 words or fewer. Figure 11 illustrates how teachers responded.
Similar to the data in Figure 10, the data in Figure 11 indicate that 94% of teachers responded they have never used the Coh-Matrix-derived TextEasability system to determine the complexity of a piece of text. Only 3% of teachers responded that they use it about half the time or sometimes. None of the teachers responded they use it always or most of the time.

Similarly, Survey Question 43 asked, “Have you ever used Pennebaker’s Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count in assessing word concreteness as an index of text complexity?” Figure 12 displays data similar to Survey Questions 41 and 42.
According to the Pengine website, Pennebaker’s Linguistic Inquiry is a computerized program that reads a “given text and counts the percentage of words that reflect different emotions, think styles, social concerns, and even parts of speech” (https://liwc.wpengine.com). However, only 8% of the teachers responded that they sometimes use this program when determining a text’s complexity. Pennebaker’s Linguistic Inquiry has a limited free version online, but to get all the features in the program, there is a licensing fee. As with the data from Survey Questions 40 and 41, it is unclear if whether few teachers use this program because they do not know of it or their school does not have a license for the program.

Selecting the type of text for instruction includes determining the complexity of the vocabulary in the text. The current study used Marzano and Simms’s (2009) definition of vocabulary as “knowing what words mean and how they interconnect allows students to connect
new information to previously learned information” (p. 5). In response to Survey Question 2 (How do teachers define complex text), the teachers noted they plan vocabulary instruction to provide students with “frequent exposure to words, encounters in multiple contexts, and deep or active processing of the words” (McKeown et al., 2013, p. 1). One teacher wrote on the survey that “a text that is not easily accessible to students due to vocabulary” has to be frontloaded or pre-taught to help activate the students’ prior knowledge before students read the material. Another teacher described it as “a text that challenges the reader via vocabulary.” In responses to Research Survey Question 30 (What do you consider the most challenging aspect(s) of teaching complex text?), one teacher explained that what made teaching complex text difficult was “a complex text requires defining difficult vocabulary,” so teachers have to plan vocabulary instruction with these problematic words in mind. One of the teachers wrote, “A text is complex if it challenges students’ decoding skills by using higher-order vocabulary.” This teacher indicated that higher order vocabulary, or vocabulary that requires critical thinking, is what impedes students from comprehending complex text. Another noted that the “academic language of the text” requires students to have an understanding of language not present in everyday conversation and understand its context in complex text. A third teacher explained that the “vocabulary-linguistic demands of the text” can include unfamiliar words, phrases, and language structures that students must comprehend to successfully understand the academic task or text. The teachers noted students need to acquire these vocabulary skills before being able to comprehend complex text. Therefore, vocabulary needs to be taken into consideration during the planning phase of instruction.

To gain a better understanding of how much of vocabulary instruction is taught in isolation and the approach teachers utilize, Survey Question 39 asked, “What percentage of
vocabulary instruction is taught in isolation in your classroom?” Teachers were given a sliding scale, from 0-100, of three choices on the survey: 1) having students use a dictionary, 2) vocabulary worksheets from textbooks, and 3) assigning a list of words and having students look up the definitions. Figure 13 depicts the response count for each of the three options.

![Response Count](image)

Figure 13: Response Rate for Survey Question 39.

In other words, 54 participants responded that when they teach vocabulary in isolation, they have students use a dictionary. In the same way, 50 participants indicated that they assign a list of words and have students look up the words. Much like the first two selections, 44 participants said that when they teach vocabulary in isolation, they give students a worksheet from a textbook. The teachers did not seem to be teaching vocabulary in isolation, which corresponds with the data from Survey Question 33, which asked, “What do you consider the most challenging aspect(s) of teaching complex text?”
In fact, responses from Survey Question 33 illustrate the need for systematic vocabulary instruction. Collectively, the teachers responded that instruction required scaffolding and systematically planned vocabulary lessons so students could better grasp the words and unpack them before reading the text. One teacher wrote, “A complex text requires defining difficult vocabulary, frontloading background information, annotation of text, multiple close reads, small group, and large group discussions, [and] graphic organizers for information.” Another teacher noted that explicit vocabulary instruction was necessary before reading the complex text “so they can understand it [complex text] easier.” Seven teachers emphasized the need for “vocabulary development,” which was accomplished by teachers creating scaffolds like graphic organizers to help their students break the vocabulary into an understandable format and to teach direct vocabulary instruction. For example, Cara started out her think-aloud by looking at the vocabulary that the unit outlined. She described how she frontloaded vocabulary for her students:

During a new unit, we [ELA teachers] were doing vocabulary frontloading, which was a big deal. Moreover, I would spend a full day with having the kids learn the robust vocabulary, and there are probably three dozen ways I would teach vocabulary in a frontloading type of situation. (Cara, Think-Aloud, October 25, 2018)

Frontloading, or teaching the vocabulary words before reading a piece of complex text, was one strategy Cara and other teachers found successful in the classroom. They contended that by exposing students to the words they would encounter, the students’ comprehension and fluency increased. In her think-aloud, Ella previewed the vocabulary for the lesson and articulated that she would have students use a graphic organizer to help with organization. This point was best captured when Ella described using a Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) chart to help her students with difficult vocabulary. She explained:

To do vocabulary, I like to do a GLAD chart, which has a couple of parts. First, I have the word ‘tyranny’ on the board, then I ask kids to share out what they know about the
word or what it sounds like, and we generate whatever ideas. No ideas are left behind. Then I kind of guide them to which ideas do not fit so much within that definition. Moreover, then I ask them to synthesize in their notebooks. Take all of these ideas and boil it down to the primary purposes for their definition in their notebooks, and then we share out a few definitions to make sure kids are getting the right idea. (Ella, Think-Aloud, September 21, 2018)

Ella said she utilized this specific graphic organizer to help her students think critically and synthesize difficult vocabulary encountered in the text. To extend this point, Lucy shared another example related to vocabulary instruction. In her think-aloud planning, she described using Quizlet, an online interactive platform, to create specific words with images:

Yeah. So, how can I pre-teach this vocabulary in a quick, efficient way? So I might put the vocabulary on Quizlet before we begin this unit. Moreover, I have used the flashcards on Quizlet, I have used the games before. Usually, I will make a flashcard, and I will have a picture if I can provide a picture, because a picture is way better than a written definition (Lucy, Think-Aloud, October 23, 2018)

Lucy, like Cara and Ella, utilized frontloading or pre-teaching as an effective strategy to scaffold difficult vocabulary. Additionally, Lucy mentioned the importance of having students practice vocabulary daily to become proficient. She brainstormed this strategy during her think-aloud:

So first-day vocabulary, some of this syntax unpacking and maybe I can... Perhaps I can work some of this sentence deconstructing I can work that in as a warm-up when they come into the class and give them a few, two or three sentences from the text and have them work in groups too. (Lucy, Think-Aloud, October 23, 2018)

Lucy said she implemented group work and scaffolding to support her activities and assist all levels of learners. She described how she used cooperative learning to engage with the questions that accompanied the complex text:

I think I’ll give them the chance to discuss the questions with their groups and that will be cross-skills group, that is what I call it, a heterogeneous group. They’ll unpack the question together and everyone in the group, that’s mixed ability levels, but then I think they need to answer the questions by themselves. (Lucy, Think-Aloud, October 23, 2018)
Giving students opportunities to reinforce their thinking and build on their peers’ ideas helped them remain engaged even though independently completing a task or text seemed overwhelming at first.

Patrick, however, took a different approach to pre-teaching vocabulary. During his think-aloud, the first thing he did was preview all the vocabulary in the unit. He described looking explicitly at the vocabulary the curriculum required him to teach. He stated that he brainstormed several ideas before deciding which one to use and offered insights about the process:

That being said, let me open up the document that deals with vocabulary. I should look at this and see how much vocab I want to teach every day. The curriculum has designed vocab definitions and then tasks to address those. These might be good for them but let us see if it deals with more than just the ten domain-specific words. Yeah. It looks like it deals with approximately these ten words. I can spread these ten words out throughout the entire unit. Maybe what I do is at the very beginning of the lesson we have a vocab day, and we come back to that vocab several times, and I could have the vocab be ‘Do Now, there are approximately ten days of vocab that’s on here. I want to spread that out throughout the unit. (Patrick, Think-Aloud, June 21, 2018)

That is, he implemented a vocabulary day and then followed up by reviewing the 10 vocabulary words every day through the daily “Do Now” activities that take place at the beginning of each class.

The narratives shared during Cara, Ella, Lucy, and Patrick’s think-aloud sessions confirmed the importance of considering vocabulary before teaching a piece of complex text. Their narratives reflected a pattern of previewing and looking at all the vocabulary prior to looking at the piece of complex text. The survey data showed that one-third of the teachers used the dictionary, worksheets, and definition look-up in isolation to teach vocabulary. The think-aloud data detailed how the teachers thoughtfully planned the tasks and the length of time they spent on vocabulary instruction before teaching the complex text.
Student engagement (how involved, interested, or motivated students appear to be in their learning) is an essential aspect to take into consideration when selecting text for instruction. Survey Question 35 asked, “When evaluating a possible text for classroom use, do you consider whether or not the text will maintain the reader’s motivation and engagement throughout the reading experience?” Teachers were given the choices of always, most of the time, about half the time, sometimes, and never. Figure 14 displays how the teachers answered the question.

When the teachers evaluated a possible text for use in the classroom, 59% indicated they always take whether it will maintain the readers’ motivation and engagement throughout the reading experience into consideration; 34% of teachers indicated they take it into consideration most of the time, while only 7% of teachers indicated they sometimes or about half the time take engagement and motivation into consideration. No one on the survey indicated they never consider whether the text will maintain the reader’s motivation and engagement throughout the reading experience. However, taking the reader’s motivation and engagement into consideration does not mean the students will be engaged and motivated to read the complex text. The teachers indicated on Survey Questions 2 and 30 that this was an obstacle that presented itself when teaching complex text.
In fact, Survey Questions 2 and 30 generated 17 qualitative comments. The teachers felt that student engagement was a major obstacle to teaching complex text. For example, one survey respondent wrote, “Getting them to engage with complex text without giving up is difficult.” Another described the challenge as “keeping student interest long enough for them to access the deeper meanings of a text, which they will then appreciate.” What is implied here is that student engagement had to be considered before planning tasks for complex text. However, the teachers contended that effort and grit are not present in all students, so the teachers needed to include tasks in their instructional planning to build those skills.

One approach to student engagement was explained by one survey participant, who wrote, “I try to look through my students’ eyes and answer the question, why does this text matter?” A similar sentiment was captured during Cindy’s think-aloud when she described using
Google Field Trips to connect with her students’ interests before introducing a piece of complex text. She said:

Sometimes I make Google Lit Trips with them, I have created a few Google Lit Trips to give them some background knowledge on places. When they read *The Outsiders*, I gave them just some 1960s research questions to do, like, “What did things cost back then?” and “What kind of clothes did they wear?” and “How are things different?” “What kind of issues did the teenagers face back then?” (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

Cindy’s use of Google Lit Trips built student engagement and frontloaded some information before reading the novel *The Outsiders*. She also felt that having clear learning objectives for her students and regularly revisiting them was a necessary part of creating purpose for her students. Cindy shared:

I like that we have an end purpose, like we picked this book and this is what we want to do with it in the end; we are not just reading it to read it, we have a goal in mind, and these are the reasons we pick this book. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

Instructional planning that included learning objectives helped Cindy keep her students engaged in the complex text they were reading. It also helped students have a clear vision of why they were reading a particular piece of text.

Patrick took a different approach to facilitating student engagement and interest in his planning. During his interview, he described how he surveyed his students at the beginning of the year:

I have a survey that I ask my students at the beginning of the year. I also require independent reading in the class. That allows students to choose their books. I do not select their books for them. That allows me to see what they are interested in reading. As the year goes on, I get to know them better, and I get to find out what backgrounds they have. By reading a lot of their journal writing, I also get to know them and some of the things that they are interested in. (Patrick, Interview, June 21, 2018)

Patrick found giving students a reading survey at the beginning of the year was a valuable way to collect information about their interests. In addition, reading their journals throughout the year
helped him to continue to learn what their interests were. Erin took yet another approach to this challenge. To create student buy-in, she did the following:

At the beginning of the year, I show my students book trailers from the previous year’s most famous teen books. I give them a sheet where they rate each book trailer and write down a few sentences about whether or not they would want to read that book based on the book trailer. Students love this activity, and it increased student engagement. (Erin, Interview, November 1, 2018)

Erin, like Patrick, used an activity at the beginning of the year to gain a better understanding of her students’ interests to help increase student buy-in when teaching the complex text.

Maintaining student interest and motivation when planning for a piece of complex text was a challenge the teachers noted throughout the survey, interviews, and think-alouds. By extension, during the think-alouds and interviews, the teachers explained the importance of close reading and annotating as tools to prepare students for the writing tasks that accompany a piece of complex text. Close reading, or “an instructional routine in which students are guided in their understanding of complex text,” allows students to dive deeper into the text to improve comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2015, p. 3). Similarly, Fisher and Frey (2015) contend that annotation – or when “students write directly on the texts as they read, identifying central ideas, circling confusing words or phrases, and writing notes in the margins such as questions, reactions, and examples – is a valuable instruction tool that deepens comprehension” (p. 3).

Survey Questions 21, 24, and 25, along with teacher interviews, portray how the teachers thought about planning for writing tasks that accompany a piece of complex text.

The teacher interviews yielded 13 comments focused on tasks that require students to write for some purpose (e.g., argumentative, literary analysis, narrative, compare/contrast). To teach the material, the teachers paired writing tasks with complex text the students had to read in class. Table 9 displays the teachers’ thinking processes as they planned for the writing tasks.
### Teachers’ Planning for Writing Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHER</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>I am hoping they will be able to pick out a thesis statement in an article. So, we will practice finding that together, but then first finding the claim, the author’s claim, and then I will go through and demonstrate what I would be looking for, looking for evidence and then highlighting in the second color what that author’s evidence is to support the claim. And I probably, I am going to make some mistakes while I’m doing it on purpose to see if they stop me and say, “Wait, that is not evidence. That is more of a reason, or that is just filler,” so that they can stop me. If they do not stop me, I am going to stop and turn around and say, “I am not sure that was right. What do you notice about this?” And so do the modeling for them, but still, have a copy of the short article in front of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>I really like Mini-Qs and DBQs, which is a form of argumentative writing, because they have a really great organization for getting kids ready to write. It also requires students to analyze several types of texts prior to writing. I also like how the structure is a 5-paragraph essay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>So, any of our writing should be focused on this book. I should be thinking about what is their writing will help them develop? Or, how will their writing help them develop? And, they should be writing over extended time frames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>When planning out the writing tasks for complex text, I first look at what type of writing is in the unit standards. It changes from unit to unit. Usually, we use a RACE or Respond, answer, cite, and explain model that requires students to go back into the text to find specific evidence and explain in their own words what that evidence means. This is difficult for most students, so we work on it a lot throughout the year.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These statements highlight how the teachers planned for writing tasks in tandem with complex text. They also reveal the teachers thoughtfully considered the type of strategies needed to teach the writing portion of the lesson that followed reading a piece of complex text. For example, during her interview, Cindy discussed how she utilized reading complex text to show different pieces of argumentative writing. More specifically, she had her students follow a protocol while reading an informational text article.
I hand them this article, and we will do a cold read. I will read out loud while they are following along and not touching the article. So, I do the cold read first, then have them go back through and number the paragraphs. Next, they go back through and read it on their own without writing anything on the article. So, they read it a second time and then put it aside. Their homework that night is to go back through with three highlighters and highlight the claim in one color and then the evidence, and they have to find at least two pieces of evidence to support the claim in a second color, and then the reasons that the evidence supports the claim in a third color. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

The purpose for having the students annotate different components of argumentative writing in the article was to allow them to read a well-written piece of argumentative writing.

Patrick utilized an approach different than Cindy’s. He used a rubric as a guide to teach writing in his classes. Patrick explained the process he liked to use:

For this unit, I have a rubric that I use to help plan their writing activities. I have Introduction, Topics and Reasons, Background Evidence, Use of Evidence, Interpretation, Coherence, Organization, and Style and Grammar. If I am going to use this to guide their essay or any sort of informative writing, then I want to have a rubric that helps them understand. I use backward planning to decide which tasks are necessary for them to be successful in the final product. (Patrick, Think-Aloud, June 21, 2018)

Here Patrick cited the use of backward planning or planning for evidence that is an actual demonstration of students’ construction of knowledge (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). This approach to curriculum design helps students demonstrate mastery not only in reading comprehension but in argumentative writing.

Similarly, Survey Question 21 asked, “Do you consider the task you are going to use for instruction before deciding on a text for your classroom?” Teachers were given the options of always, most of the time, about half the time, sometimes, and never. Figure 15 depicts how the teachers answered.
Here, a large majority of teachers (79%) indicated they always take into consideration the task they are going to utilize for instruction prior to deciding on the text. A much smaller number of teachers (15%) indicated they consider the task most of the time. Only 6% of teachers stated they consider the task sometimes (5%) or about half the time (1%). No one indicated they never consider the task prior to selecting a piece of complex text. In other words, when planning tasks for a piece of complex text, most teachers said they know what task they are going to have students do prior to making a text selection. In fact, when teachers were asked how they approach teaching informational or complex text, 73% responded close/critical reading.

Teachers indicated they use informational text about half the time (52%). To better understand the approach they took when teaching informational text, Survey Question 29 asked, “Which of the following approaches best describe your approach to the reading and study of nonfiction or informational text in your classroom instruction?” Teachers were given five options: close/critical reading, disciplinary literacy approach, multicultural, using question-
answer-responses (QAR), or none of the above (please specify). Figure 16 depicts how the teachers answered.

Figure 16: Teachers’ approach to reading informational text.

A vast majority of teachers, 73%, indicated that they use a close reading or critical approach when teaching informational text, or nonfiction. Only 13% indicated they use QAR. In the same way, only 10% responded that they utilize a disciplinary approach. Also, only 3% responded that they use a multicultural approach. Only 2% selected none. One answered the question this way: “Reading strategies/English lab for low level readers.” Another stated, “It’s completely dependent of the text and my purpose for using it.” Clearly, utilizing a critical or close reading approach was the most popular response and that may be due to the emphasis the CCSS put on close reading as a way to teach complex text.
Along with Survey Question 29, Survey Question 24 asked, “How often do students annotate when reading informational or nonfiction text in your class?” Similar to Survey Question 21, teachers were given the choices of always, most of the time, about half the time, sometimes, and never. Figure 17 depicts the overall view of teachers’ responses.

Figure 17: How often students annotate when reading informational text.

Responses were more evenly distributed for this question. For instance, 39% of teachers responded they have students annotate informational text most of the time, and 29% of teachers said they always have students annotate while reading informational text. By contrast, only 16% responded they have students annotate about half the time, much like the 15% who responded they only have students annotate sometimes. No one responded that they never have students annotate when reading informational text.
Since many teachers used annotating and close reading in conjunction, Survey Question 25 asked, “Does the goal of close reading and annotation impact how you select text for classroom instruction?” Figure 18 illustrates the teachers’ responses.

![Figure 18: How close reading and annotation impact text selection.](image)

Much like the data from Survey Question 24, Survey Question 25 data indicated that over 60% of teachers said the goal of close reading and annotation impacted how they selected text for classroom instruction. In the same way as Survey Question 24, over 30% of teachers said they consider the goal of close reading and annotation prior to selecting a text, while only 1% of teachers answered they never take it into consideration. Hence, a majority of teachers who were interviewed and/or responded to the survey indicated they take the goal of close reading and annotation into consideration when selecting and text and use this task to increase their students’ reading comprehension.
Differentiation, or the tailoring of instruction to meet individual needs, was the second major theme to emerge from the data. A total of 78 qualitative comments were derived from survey questions, interviews, and think-aloud sessions. Differentiation can be done in many ways in the secondary English language arts classroom, such as differentiating the Lexile level of text and tasks used in the classroom, flexible grouping, or different learning environments.

The teachers said they felt challenged by the wide range of reading levels presented by students in their class. Because supporting all levels of learners in the classroom can look different depending on the teacher and the class and goes beyond just differentiating the curriculum, the teachers said they had to use multiple strategies to reach the different reading abilities and learning styles.

In response to Survey Question 30 (“What do you consider the most challenging aspect(s) of teaching complex text?”), a common theme surfaced through 32 comments that expressed the struggle of differentiating and scaffolding complex text for the wide variety of readers in the classroom. Table 10 depicts how teachers responded to this question.

Cara echoed in her interview the frustration of having students who are not reading at grade level

Every year, I used to find that kids less and less came into eighth grade at grade level, and this was for the school that I taught at for the last 11 years. However, yes, because kids just do not read as much on their own as they did 12 or 15 years ago. (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018)
### Qualitative Comments About Differentiation for Research Question 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation for sped, ELL, &amp; gifted/talented</td>
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<tr>
<td>With my students, the most challenging part is finding texts that have buy-in with them and that aren’t too complicated for their varying education levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting all levels of readers in a diverse classroom from diverse backgrounds and with diverse interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding for students with different skill levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing several different reading groups so that kids (I am at a small school with kids of varying levels in one class) and/or finding texts that I can scaffold to engage and challenge students of multiple reading levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the time to allow and encourage students to dig deeper on their own. Sometimes scaffolding more makes things go faster, but that is not always best for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping struggling readers with it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My students are emerging English language learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My students prior knowledge and accessibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reaching low students when the text is too difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have many readers who are below proficient in reading skills, and I have non-readers, so getting them to actually engage with complex text without giving up is difficult. I can get them to read Harry Potter, but many of them are resistant to more complex text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a text that is complex for the class as a whole or finding multiple texts on the same topic or theme to differentiate and personalize the experience for a student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding and using texts that are both complex and accessible by all kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diverse range of student reading levels (I teach 8th grade and my students come with an average of 5-6th grade reading levels, some are as low as 3rd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation for students who struggle with, or are not comfortable with, reading more challenging texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating to the different needs in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation for students who struggle with, or are not comfortable with, reading more challenging texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to appropriate resource and the readability of text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding ways for all students to comprehend text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating for multiple levels of readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting for students on IEP’s/504’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibly, and connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always having a class the ranges from primary to college level reading skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating text for a wide range of learners in one classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriately scaffolding needed skills or background knowledge to make the text accessible for every student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating for students who read at vastly different abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation for students who struggle with, or are not comfortable with, reading more challenging texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating to the different needs in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiating for students who read at vastly different abilities.</td>
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</table>
In contrast, some teachers expressed frustration about how to meet the needs of students who are reading above grade level. Students identified as gifted and talented (GT) require more complex text and activities to challenge their critical thinking skills. Ella described a strategy she uses with her GT students to help them with their writing after reading a piece of complex text:

For my GT kids, however, I would make them keep that bucket or column of information for counterclaim because that is a big push for them. That is too much for them, so that would be more personal conversations with the student; you need to make sure you include a counterclaim. (Ella, Interview, September 21, 2018)

Ella said she found conferencing was a successful way to stretch their critical thinking about a complex text. During her think-aloud, Cindy shared the text selection process she utilizes with her honors students. She stated:

The book *Night* we do with our advanced and honors kids during our World War II unit in the fourth quarter, and a couple of the teachers that used to be here, who are not here anymore, were only reading sections of it, and I’m like, “How do you just read a section? The kids are not going to understand what is happening,” and they were like, “Well, they just need to get the gist.” And I am like, “You just need to get the gist of the Holocaust?” What... [chuckle] “How do you just get the gist?” That really bothered me, so I struggled with that. (Cindy, Think-Aloud, September 12, 2018)

Cindy shared her belief that reading excerpts from novels was not the best way to increase students’ understanding of a complex text, especially GT students. Even though some teachers in her building decided to follow that practice, she staunchly disagreed with their decision.

The teachers needed to consider how to increase motivation before they could introduce the difficult text to the students. In response to Survey Question 30, lack of motivation and interest emerged. Table 11 displays the 17 qualitative comments.
Table 11

Survey Responses from Question 30 on Student Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Comments from Question 30 on Student Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varied levels and interests determine motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ willingness to continue when faced with challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students’ lack of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ ability to focus, work through difficulties, maintain interest...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The multiple layers of reading abilities in the classroom. How do I keep everyone engaged and challenged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most challenging aspect of teaching complex texts is student engagement or “buy-in.” I try to look through my students’ eyes and answer the question why does this text matter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lexile my students are at is very low, and age appropriate content is hard to find for lower readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interest of the students, the ability of the students and background knowledge with some vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student grit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student engagement and relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping students motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping student interest long enough for them to access the deeper meanings of a text, which they will then appreciate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student apathy towards rigor and challenge. All Scholars can rise to the occasion with some concentrated effort and grit. We are facing a new generation of instant gratification and readers want to understand immediately, without doing the heavy lift of digging into context and allusions, author influence, politics, symbolism...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capturing and maintaining student interest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the teachers shared strategies they used to problem-solve issues related to lack of motivation and interest. One of the strategies they shared in their interviews was the use of Newsela, an educational platform through which teachers can access thousands of articles and activities for the classroom. It offers teachers the option to select up to five different Lexile
levels for each article. Cara confirmed that she used this platform: “I use Newsela! When I found out about that, I was like, Oh, my gosh, this is gonna save me so much time” (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018). Cindy also shared how she used Newsela to differentiate the level of the text in an article her students were reading:

So, I picked an article from Newsela for my honor students to read, and it is called “California seeks equality by ending bail, but critics fear new problems.” So the reason I picked it is I wanted to practice close reading with them and having them eventually do a debate on it, but it fits well with, following a few books that we have read. We read *Nothing but the Truth* by Avi to start with. And following that, we read *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. And then they read *The Outsiders*. So they read those first three books. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

Cindy explained that she explicitly uses Newsela to increase the Lexile level to challenge her honors students. She also shared how she used Newsela in her regular (non-honors) English language arts classroom. She said:

With grade level, I try to have two different levels, sometimes three, depending on whom I’ve got in the room. I do have some very low-level readers this year that are really struggling. We have been talking about giving them some sixth grade-level text to ease them into feeling some success with doing the article over the week and then... Well, their first couple. But then there are some kids who are reading at mid... at a higher level, seventh grade reading level. So I need to give them the same article, same topics, so they could still have the same discussion in class, but at the higher level vocabulary. And that is what I really like about Newsela is that you can, say, have the same article but adjust the reading level, and they still get the same information. (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

The teachers found tools like Newsela were valuable because they could meet all levels of learners in their classrooms, yet since the students were reading the same article, they all received the same information.

Cara described that she works to meet the diverse backgrounds and interests by picking a topic (e.g., bullying) relevant to all students and selecting questioning strategies that increase critical thinking. She said:
And so, we would ask some questions like, “What would you infer about this? Why do you think somebody’s yearbook photo looks like this?” We already would have launched the bullying unit, which is extremely emotional. Thus, because all of us have either been in situations where we have been bullied, or we have been the bully, or we have been a bystander, you are one of those three. And so, everybody has a lot to say about that, and many feelings go around it. So, they are excited about diving into texts and things on the topic. So, I go through, and I have my own clean copy of the text. And in the title, “memoirs,” you get your first word, memoir. We have already defined what bullying is. (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018)

Cara’s insight into using differentiated strategies that include high-interest topics and questioning strategies demonstrates another way to reach all levels of reading and interests in the classroom.

The teachers contended that planning for students who are non- or low-level readers (i.e., those who cannot yet read written words or are reading three to four grade levels below their current grade) required an entirely different process. As one survey participant shared, “I have many readers who are below proficient in reading skills, and I have non-readers.” This frustration was captured both on the survey and in the semi-structured interviews in that the teachers feared they were not meeting the various levels of readers in their classrooms. For instance, Ella stated:

Next week, we are talking about the grievances of the Declaration of Independence. If I gave them all the grievances, kids would shut down and not even try. So, I’m breaking them into smaller chunks for them to analyze, and pulling out what exactly they are upset about and what they are saying that King George was doing in these grievances. (Ella, Think-Aloud, September 21, 2018)

This statement captures Ella’s frustration and insecurities about overwhelming her students with a complex text that will not only produce disengagement but completely shut down those who are non- or low-level readers.

The teachers also noted that students who are reading significantly below grade level are typically partnered with students identified as ELLs because both groups are struggling readers. Cara shared a strategy she has used to help meet the needs of both groups of students. She said:
In my low classes, my low reader classes that had a lot of ESL students, I would have them read it out loud to each other and take turns. And then they have a conversation about what they think that part of the text is about. I would be showing them, as we go along, the two different types of summarizing that we use, the “Who? What? Where? When? Why? And so what?” And we usually would have with this text, because it was so long, I would have three stopping points. And at the end of each stopping point, they had to summarize what happened from the beginning to the end of that stopping point. And that is where “Who? What? Where? When? Why? And so what?” can be used. (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018)

Cara explained that by combining reading aloud with stopping points and summarizing techniques, she allowed her students processing time to think and reflect before moving forward in the text. Cara also described a strategy she uses to help some of the struggling readers in her classes:

So, we [my team] give them a bookmark that is laminated, and on the one side, we have the type of things that you do, the type of skills that you use when you Read Like a Reader. When you are reading like a reader, you are doing things like asking questions, you are making predictions, you are drawing inferences, you are making connections to other texts. Moreover, we always found it very successful in connecting it to their own lives. (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018)

Similarly, Erin shared in her interview this strategy to meet the needs of her students:

To meet the needs of my lower readers, I use Kagan Cooperative Learning Strategies. One of my favorites is called Timed-Pair-Share. This offers students a quick two-way share at any point of the lesson. I switch this up a lot. Sometimes I have students share with a partner that is facing them, and other times I have them use their shoulder partners. This offers students the opportunity to discuss a piece of text an hear from other students in a safe way, so they feel more comfortable discussing the text. (Erin, Interview, November 1, 2018)

Clearly, the ability to successfully differentiate lessons for a piece of complex text to meet the wide range of reading abilities in the classroom was an obstacle many teachers voiced. Yet, during the think-aloud and interviews, the teachers communicated some solutions they have adopted in their classrooms to overcome this obstacle. The ability to meet the needs of every student in the classroom is very difficult; however, the task becomes more manageable when
teachers use platforms like Newsela to give them access to texts offered in a variety of Lexile levels. In addition, the use of graphic organizers and cooperative learning strategies can be beneficial for students who read at different Lexile levels.

Chapter Summary

Text as a consideration for instructional planning was the more significant theme that emerged from the data (228 total comments/responses). The teachers all noted that determining a text’s complexity is not an easy task, and even though there are many tools available to help them determine the quantitative Lexile level of a text, very few teachers used them. A vast majority of teachers, 80%, indicated they always consider what type of task they want students to do prior to selecting it. They also indicated it is important to consider vocabulary during the instructional planning phase of teaching complex text and stated that scaffolding and graphic organizers, rather than isolated worksheets, were two key elements for teaching a piece of complex text.

The second major theme, differentiation, had a total of 78 qualitative comments from the survey, interviews, and think-aloud sessions. The majority of the teachers noted that using cooperative learning strategies and purposeful grouping kept the students engaged and better able to grapple with the complex text and increase engagement. Furthermore, the teachers agreed that the Newsela platform was extremely helpful because it offers each article in five different Lexile levels and they did not have to find several pieces of text to meet all the reading levels in the classroom. It also provided students with the opportunity to discuss the same topic, since they were all reading the same article.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the criteria secondary ELA teachers used to determine text complexity and activities for instruction that take into consideration students’ diverse academic and sociocultural needs. The study yielded two significant insights: (1) consideration of how accessibility of texts impacts teachers as well as students and (2) the importance of teachers scaffolding tasks and texts for instructional use. Additionally, recommendations are included for secondary English language arts teachers, professional organizations, and the developers of the CCSS.

First Insight: Accessibility of Text

Harris (2016) contends that teachers need to have a clear understanding of the language of Standard 10 in the CCSS if they are going to select appropriate levels of text for students. While Appendix B of the CCSS provides a list of exemplary texts to make text selection more manageable, the secondary level teachers in this study reported they had to first think about their students’ reading levels before deciding which text to select. Because the teachers had to differentiate not only their instruction but also the levels of classroom texts, scaffolding and employing differentiated reading strategies in the classroom were still not enough to allow all students to access the same piece of text equally. Therefore, the secondary level ELA teachers in this study continuously looked for complex texts that were already differentiated by Lexile level to meet Anchor 10 of the CCSS. Often that meant that if there were not multiple Lexile levels of the texts available, the teacher did not use it.
Furthermore, teachers were often working with the text that was accessible to them and were not provided with additional funds to purchase material to meet the needs of all students. In order to ensure that text is accessible to all levels of readers, schools and districts need to provide additional funding on a yearly basis to ensure students are provided with appropriate text. Many teachers spend monies out of their own pocket to supplement the curriculum that is required for students because they want what is best for students.

The survey data for this study indicated that over 50% of the secondary-level teachers never referred to Appendix B when selecting text and planning for instruction. The teachers who participated in the think-aloud protocols described using required curriculum guides or websites, like Newsela, that offer multiple versions of Lexile levels for one piece of complex texts. Cara explained, “When I found out about [Newsela], I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is gonna save me so much time’” (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018). Cindy’s think-aloud comments addressed student access to the content: “What I really like about Newsela is that you can have the same article but adjust the reading level. And they still get the same information” (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018). In short, the teachers felt that determining how accessible the text was in different Lexile levels was more important than using the CCSS and appendices as resources, which were little or no use for supporting struggling readers. According to Schieble (2014), several studies have found that ELA teachers and researchers have challenged the text exemplar list for several reasons, including its overemphasis on "classic" or canonical literature, lack of contemporary texts that engage a youth audience, and overreliance on print in a digital age (e.g., Botzakis, Burns & Hall, 2014; Moss, 2013; Thein & Beach, 2013). Short (2013) contends the reason the text exemplar list contains so many outdated titles boiled down to money because to have titles that are more recent and include multiple text levels would simply cost more money
than the government wants to allocate. In fact, Short learned from an interview with a CCSSO administrator that the original list for Appendix B had to be amended because "getting permission to publish excerpts without paying large permission fees" was a challenge they were unable to overcome (p. 2). What is more, states and school districts were short-sighted when it came to allocating funds for proper implementation of the CCSS. Initially, districts spent millions on buying materials that were labeled “Aligned to the CCSS.” However, that has been over a decade ago and there has been little funding to supplement initial purchases of materials.

The findings from this current study also support what the RRSG (2002) and Gaskins and Labbo (2007) found in their research. The RRSG contended that teachers must understand the challenges readers bring to the classroom when deconstructing complex text. For example, the RRSG found:

The capabilities and dispositions the reader brings to the task of reading, his or her engagement in and response to given texts, and the quality of the outcomes produced by the act of reading for some purposes are, themselves, shaped by cultural and subcultural influences, socioeconomic status, home and family background, peer influences, classroom culture, and instructional history. (RRSG, 2002, p. 20)

Gaskin and Labbo (2007) identified that students’ motivation and social development are critical components when considering appropriate texts for readers, noting that students are not motivated to learn when they are faced with a text three to four grade levels above their comprehension. The teachers in this study echoed similar thoughts. For example, in response to Survey Question 30, one teacher said, “The most challenging aspect of teaching complex texts is student engagement or buy-in. I try to look through my students' eyes and answer the question, why does this text matter?” Teachers may not consider viewing a text through their students’ eyes as a viable scaffold; however, looking at different texts with various perspectives can enable
teachers to select or disregard texts that are not appropriate for their students because of their capabilities and dispositions. It is important that teachers remember that if students are not in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978) that students who are struggling readers will lack the motivation to participate in the lesson. For instance, the use of McCaslin’s (2004) co-regulation (CR) construct can help increase students’ motivation. McCaslin (2004) contends that students are experts in matters related to their social worlds, whereas teachers are generally novices in their students’ social worlds. Yet McCaslin emphasizes that teachers are experts in how to be successful in school, and students are novices in this respect. Selecting the “right” piece of complex text for students involves teachers taking into consideration students’ zone of proximal development and McCaslin’s co-regulation construct. Looking at the whole student with these things in mind will empower teachers to select a piece of complex text that increases motivation and determination while building capacity to grapple with a piece of complex text that is above their instructional reading level.

Creating viable instructional text scaffolds for secondary ELA teachers that focus on analyzing syntax will build their capacity to teach complex texts to all levels of learners in the classroom. When discussing instructional text scaffolds, it is important to distinguish between interactional and planned scaffolding. According to Athaneses and de Oliveria, (2014) and Hammond and Gibbons, (2005), interactional scaffolding is defined as a support providing humans with a responsive approach to a learner’s immediate needs. On the contrary, planned scaffolding, which is the support provided by tools and curriculum that can be extended across settings but is not contingent upon the immediate needs of individual learners (Putambekar & Hubscher, 2005; Stone, 1998; Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Based on what teachers
reported in this study, the syntax of text was what made teaching complex text difficult for teachers and what made comprehension difficult for students.

For instance, on the survey, one participant responded to Question 30, “What do you consider the most challenging aspect of complex text?” this way: “Identifying the purpose of clauses. We are facing a new generation of instant gratification and readers want to understand immediately, without doing the heavy lift of digging into context and allusions, author influence, politics, symbolism.” Another responded this way: “Students have a hard time with complex sentences, they find it difficult to keep track of the meaning if there are too many dependent clauses. many students are still working on decoding.” Therefore, it is essential that teachers implement both interactional and planned scaffolds during a lesson that involves a piece of complex text.

For example, if a teacher is planning a lesson with a piece of complex text, planned scaffolding would be frontloading background knowledge and pre-teaching a set of difficult vocabulary words. These are structures, that teachers in the study consistently reported implementing. However, interactional scaffolding is much more difficult because it requires that the teacher responds face-to-face with the students to identify the nuances that make a text complex. In fact, facilitating a class discussion that promotes critical thinking of the texts would be a great example of an interactional scaffold.

However, interactional scaffolding might not go far enough to help students comprehend a piece of complex text. Teachers need to move away from the overemphasis on cognitive strategies and embrace more involved approaches. For example, functional language analysis (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008), or FLA, is “an approach to secondary content area reading grounded in semantic functional linguistics” (p. 591; Halliday, 1994). According to Fang and
Schleppegrell (2008; 2010) functional language analysis provides “a metalanguage for talking about the meaning in the choices authors make as they write clauses, sentences, and texts” (p. 588). They go onto to further say that FLA “enables students to identity language patterns and associated meanings specific to particular disciplines as they focus on how language works, helping them comprehend and critique texts of secondary content areas” (p. 588). The brilliant part of utilizing the FLA approach is that secondary ELA teachers can use it with all types of texts, including informational and fiction. Teachers do not need to integrate different strategies with different types of texts. The FLA approach is also ideal for comprehending disciplinary-specific texts therefore, it can be implemented across all disciplines.

To implement this approach into the classroom setting, teachers would need to spend time working with students on the metalanguage of FLA. First, secondary ELA teachers would have to work on introducing the four major types of processes that FLA recognizes. According to Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) the four process are:

Doing (realized by action verbs like perform and calculate), sensing (realized by thinking and feeling verbs like think and fear), being (realized by relating verbs like be and here), and saying (realized by talking verbs like say and speak). Processes involve people or things (called participants), typically realized in noun phrases (e.g., Chester, it, a variety of subcellular structures called organelles, conviction), and these participants take on different semantic roles in different process types (as actors, sayers, etc). (p. 592)

The second step teachers would take is introducing students to the metalanguage of the mood and modality systems of language. Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) break it down in this way:

The mood system allows us to make statements (normally expressed in declarative mood), and issues questions (normally expressed in interrogative mood), and issue commands (normally expressed in imperative mood). The modality system allows us to construe possibility, certainty, normality, seriousness, necessity, and obligation. Modal verbs (e.g., should, might, ought to), modal adjectives (e.g., definite, absolute, usual), modal adverbs (e.g., perhaps, certainly, typically), and modal nouns (e.g., requirement, necessity) along with attitudinal vocabulary, enables us to construe stance, judgement, and evaluation. (p. 592)
Introducing students to the four major types of processes and the metalanguage of the mood and modality systems can take up a significant amount of class time. Yet, it is time well spent because teachers will be able to move beyond just comprehension and onto debate, discussion, and critical analysis. These are the outcomes that teachers want students to be able to do, but teachers continue to use the same cognitive approaches to read a piece of complex text and are frustrated that students are not able to comprehend or interact with the texts. If secondary ELA teachers want students to move beyond comprehension into analyzing, they need to change the way they are teaching students how to comprehend a piece of complex text. Fang and Schleppegrell (2010) suggest that teachers can use this approach to “explore the meaning an author has constructed in a text through the language choices” (p. 596). Implementing the FLA approach will empower secondary ELA teachers to build their students’ capacity to become independent, critical readers.

The sociocultural context for reading, which includes peer textual discussion and attending to the motivational needs of readers, is a critical aspect teachers need to consider and include in their instruction for students' reading comprehension to increase (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003; Guthrie et al., 2004; RRG,S 2002). The secondary-level teachers in the current study also emphasized the need for considering the sociocultural context of their students before selecting complex text.

For instance, one survey participant said it best, “I try to look through my students’ eyes and answer the question, why does this text matter?” Additionally, the lack of real-life experience was something the teachers tried to bridge with the help of technology. For example,
in her think-aloud protocol, Cindy shared how she used Google Lit Trips to build background information for students:

Sometimes I make Google Lit Trips with them… to give them some background knowledge of places. When they read *The Outsiders*, I gave them just some 1960s research questions to do like, “What did things cost back then?” and “What kind of clothes did they wear?” and “How are things different?” “What kind of issues did the teenagers face back then?” (Cindy, Interview, September 12, 2018)

These secondary-level teachers all noted that students’ motivation increased if they could relate to what they were reading and had an interactive way of deconstructing what they read.

Nevertheless, with the perpetual changes in student population and school climates, complex text selection needs to be an ongoing process. For example, the RAND RRSG conceptual framework illustrates the importance of context and sociocultural supports for all readers; however, it does not address the need for social justice consideration. Furthermore, the RRSG’s conceptual framework fails to take into consideration the importance of selecting complex text that focuses on current event topics’. Specifically, global warming and the Covid-19 pandemic, because these are issues currently impacting society as well as future generations. If teachers were all given premium access to websites like Newsela, which has current events, the criteria could easily be met. Yet, the price tag for a school that has between 1,000-1,200 students is $10,000 per year. Therefore, many schools and districts cannot afford to provide the premium version of the platform to teachers. Lastly, teachers in this study cited lack of motivation as one of the difficulties that presents itself when teaching complex text. Embedding current events text and texts that target social-justice issues has the potential to increase students’ motivation to read complex text.
Second Insight: Importance of Scaffolding Complex Text for Student Success

The second valuable insight revealed in this study was how important it was for teachers to use scaffolds while teaching complex text. In fact, the ability for students to successfully comprehend complex text depended on the strategic placement of scaffolds throughout a lesson using complex text. The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) emphasized that

the effects of contextual factors, including economic resources, class membership, ethnicity, neighborhood, and school culture, can be seen in oral language practices, in students’ self-concepts, in the types of literacy activities in which individuals engage, in instructional history, and, of course, in the likelihood of successful outcomes. (p. 39)

In the current study, several survey participants expressed their frustration that “differentiating for students who read at vastly different abilities” proved most challenging when teaching complex text. The teachers noted that because of the wide range of reading levels, they had to create scaffolds, or supports, for students to be able to access a piece of complex text when various levels of the text were not available. Some of the strategies they employed were partner read-alouds, purposeful grouping, close reading, selecting high-interest topics, and questioning strategies, to name a few.

Lee and Spratley’s (2010) research reinforced the idea of needing to employ a variety of scaffolding tools when teaching with complex text. They used Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to demonstrate that teachers can have success with historical pieces of complex text. Based on their results, comprehension dramatically increased for students when the teachers allocated time during the reading for students to question Shakespeare’s choices and determine the meaning of sentences (Lee & Spratley, 2010). Similarly, Langer’s (2011) research found that teachers could scaffold difficult text by allowing students to discuss a section like Act II, Scene iii. In small groups, students learned through “in-context experience—by listening to the conversation,
questioning their classmates, and participating in the discussion” (p. 134). Additional research (e.g., Petrosky, McConachie, & Mihalakis, 2010) found that teachers can create “difficulty questions” to guide students’ deciphering of the texts as “appropriate at the whole-discourse and sentence levels” (p. 141). Nevertheless, these scaffolding strategies are time-consuming, and the teachers from Petrosky et al.’s study stated that they often did not have enough time to create these types of scaffolding techniques.

Indeed, these strategies are considered best practices, yet they are very time consuming and require teachers to spend a great deal more time in the planning process. Ideally, every teacher would be embedding these strategies into their daily lesson plans, but teachers are continuously required to do more work without any additional planning time. Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Susan Moore Johnson discovered in her latest book, *Where Teachers Thrive* (2019), that no matter how long their workday was, most teachers said they did not have enough time to complete “essential tasks.” Responsibilities like grading, reading, lesson planning, and calling parents often fell into out-of-school hours, leading many teachers to question whether they could teach at the level of quality they aspired to or would stay long in the profession. (p. 96)

One scaffolding technique mentioned during the think-aloud protocols in the current study was purposeful grouping. The teachers mentioned that when they had students who were reading two or more grade levels below, they partnered those students with students who learned English as a second language. Purposefully grouping students according to their reading level helped reduce the workload of scaffolding for teachers, as shown in the following example from
Cara's interview when she described using purposeful grouping as a scaffold to work on fluency, summarizing, and speaking with her lower readers. Cara detailed:

In my low classes, my low reader classes that had a lot of ESL students, I would have them read it out loud to each other and take turns. And then they have a conversation about what they think that part of the text is about. I would be showing them, as we go along, the two different types of summarizing that we use, the "Who? What? Where? When? Why? And so what?" And we usually would have with this text, because it was so long, I would have three stopping points. And at the end of each stopping point, they had to summarize what happened from the beginning to the end of that stopping point. And that is where "Who? What? Where? When? Why? And so what?" can be used. (Cara, Interview, November 27, 2018)

The idea of utilizing one scaffolding strategy to cover several reading skills helped the teachers save time by providing students with strategies that would increase their reading comprehension. Yet, creating purposeful groups in a classroom entails analyzing a large amount of data, and secondary ELA teachers have between 100-135 students. Therefore, teachers would need specific plan days allocated for just this task, ideally, once at the beginning of the year and again during the middle of the year after students have shown growth.

Implications of Findings to the Larger Field of Education

Teachers have always grappled with how to help students read a difficult text (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). The most recent solution came packaged as the Common Core State Standards, specifically Standard 10 that requires the student to read grade-level text. New requirements were embedded within those standards for teachers to increase the complexity of the text utilized in the classroom (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a). Supporters of increasing text complexity, like Adams (2011), argued that methods for text selection before CCSS "ultimately denies the student the very language, information, and modes of thought they need most to move up and on" (p. 6). However, recent research by Reynolds and Goodwin (2016) has pointed to some unintended consequences that have resulted from Standard 10.
On the survey and during the think-aloud process, the teachers often voiced concerns about student motivation regarding the complex texts and tasks they planned. Sanden (2014) argued that continuous exposure to texts that broaden students’ comprehension abilities may affect their motivation to read (see also Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012; McRae & Guthrie, 2009). Hiebert and Mesmer (2013) also maintained that the evidence supporting Standard 10 and the need for increased text complexity were largely derived from the high-school level, leaving younger readers exposed to repeated failure if supports are not in place (Reynolds & Goodwin, 2016). These repeated failures were the concerns teachers in the study were referring to.

According to Goldstein (2014), implementation of the CCSS and the increased complexity grade bands shook the literacy foundation in which secondary English language arts teachers are grounded. Never before had the federal government meddled so heavily in the states’ individual education systems. A foundational change like this cannot be made without collateral damage. Teachers across the nation lost their ability to select and create literary lessons students loved. Suddenly, if the novel or text did not align with the new standards, it was prohibited. Teachers found themselves with books, curricula, and materials that were no longer acceptable. On a recent episode of *The Daily Podcast* (Barbaro, 2019), Goldstein eloquently summarized the impact CCSS has had on education:

Local control was sort of the founding orthodoxy of American public education in the 19th century. Our Constitution does not include the word education. There is no sort of role for the federal government that allows them to reach into schools, reach into classrooms, and change practices.

In other words, comparing the United States students’ performance to how other countries’ students perform in the classroom is an act of futility. No education system in the world operates like the United States. Therefore, unless all the variables are the same, the results are bound to be
different. Increasing text complexity at a time when secondary-level teachers continue to have more and more students who speak English as a second or third language has added to the daily challenges faced by educators. The data from this study support this point.

Recent results published by the NAEP (2019) specific to the Nation’s Report Card revealed that the average reading scores for students at Grades 4 and 8 were lower in 2019 compared to 2009 when the CCSS was adopted, which means that after a decade of the CCSS being fully implemented, students’ reading scores, across the nation, have declined. According to the NCES (2015),

At grade 12, the national sample of schools and students is drawn from across the country, and results from the assessed students are combined to provide accurate estimates of the overall performance of twelfth-graders in the nation. There are no state results for grade 12 in 2015. The reading assessment was not administered in grade 12 in 2017. (para. 2)

Similar to the scores in grades four and eight, the 12\textsuperscript{th}-grade reading scores declined minimally. The NAEP 2015 Report Card indicated that the average score for 12\textsuperscript{th} graders was 287, which was one point lower than the score of 288 in 2009. This means the students who took the 2015 test as 12\textsuperscript{th} graders had had exposure to the new CCSS curriculum for six years, but after six years of the new CCSS and the increased reading complexity, their reading scores remained stagnant. Consequently, the need for increasing complex text that Hiebert and Mesmer's (2013) research claimed was mostly derived from a high-school level has shown that, even with the increased complexity, there has been no growth in high school reading scores.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are for English language secondary-level teachers, professional organizations, and amendments to the current Common Core Literacy Standards.
My first recommendation is for secondary ELA teachers to develop different approaches to teaching a piece of complex text. The recommendations for amendments to the Common Core Literacy Standards are to include specific scaffolding strategies for teachers and diversify the text titles to include more relevant and multicultural selections. Finally, professional organizations need to create professional development experiences that specifically focus on teaching students complex text so they can proficiently meet the requirements of Standard 10.

For English Language Arts Secondary-Level Teachers

The first recommendation for ELA teachers at the secondary level is to develop new and different approaches to teach complex text. For example, teachers need to learn the FLA approach and use it with students to see if it is successful. Teachers need to move beyond cognitive strategies (e.g., think-aloud, visualizing, frontloading, inferring, predicting) to more complicated strategies that invoke students’ critical thinking skills.

Keeping Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development in mind, teachers should also find complex text that is relevant and relatable to secondary students. Classic novels and plays that are part of the canon are great, but often students struggle with comprehending and connecting with such texts. Utilizing rap lyrics and multicultural poetry and literature can be an excellent way to increase students' motivation because it is relevant to their lives, and they can make connections with it. For example, comparing Tupac’s lyrics and with Maya Angelou’s poetry is an excellent way to merge multicultural literature and rap lyrics. When students are motivated to read something, their ability to persevere with complicated text increases dramatically (Fisher & Frey, 2015).

The last recommendation is to create tasks that include discussion and require students to participate in the discussion as a leader and/or participant. For example, a Socratic seminar,
which is defined as a "collaborative, intellectual dialogue facilitated with open-ended questions about the text" (Roberts & Billings, 2012, p. 22), is an excellent strategy to help students understand the concepts after reading a piece of complex text. Through a structured facilitated discussion, students' comprehension increases, and they "use their knowledge about how the text works and what it means as they interact with others" (Fisher & Frey, 2015, p. 173). The fantastic thing about activities like a Socratic seminar is that they can be used with any type of complex text and allow students to take ownership of their learning experience.

**Professional Development Suggestion for Secondary ELA Teachers**

Given that the data published in 2015 by the NAEP have shown that reading scores in Grades 4, 8, and 12 have remained stagnant or declined in the last decade, it is essential that states, districts, and teachers re-examine the CCSS reading standards to determine their future relevancy. Furthermore, data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) showed that between 2000 and 2015, the percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools who were White decreased from 61 to 49%. The percentage of Black students also decreased during this period from 17 to 15%. In contrast, there was an increase in the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were Hispanic (from 16 to 26%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (4 to 5%) during this period (NCES, 2015). This demographic shift means that Standard 10 and the CCSS appendices need to be revamped to include specific scaffolding techniques that focus on ESL students, so teachers have access to the materials they need. The current verbiage: "scaffolding as needed" is vague and lacks specific strategies teachers need to teach Standard 10 (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a, p.7).

Teachers need professional development that targets specific scaffolding techniques for interactional scaffolding and motivational scaffolds. According to research by Reynolds and
Goodwin (2016), the interactional and motivational scaffolds they used in their study helped educators “maintain moment-to-moment engagement that sustained readers across textual challenges” (p. 12). Building teachers’ competence to successfully implement specific interactional and motivational strategies will enable them to have the tools they need to successfully teach complex text to all of their students.

In addition, the current appendices of the CCSS do not go far enough to provide teachers with the resources they need to implement Anchor 10 properly. It is time for additional appendices to provide lists of complex text for each grade level with at least three new versions of the texts at different Lexile levels so that teachers do not have to spend time searching for resources. Additionally, titles need to represent the diversity and variety of cultures potentially present in the classroom.

For teachers to be able to teach to the increased requirements of Standard 10, professional development needs to be provided. When the CCSS were implemented, the government did not sufficiently allocate funds for the level of professional development the teachers needed. School districts created professional development for their teachers based on the resources available to them; therefore, teachers were not given equitable professional development experiences.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be considered when interpreting the results. First, this study was limited to secondary ELA teachers from one district. A more extensive study that incorporates several urban school districts is recommended to make generalizations to other populations of teachers. Also, the sample size for the survey was 72, and only seven teachers participated in the think-aloud protocol. A larger study from teachers in multiple states that incorporated more teachers could provide additional data.
Another limitation of this study was the design. This descriptive design used think-aloud protocols, semi-structured interviews, and a survey. A limitation of the think-aloud protocol is that it is representative of what teachers verbalize and does not include anything the teachers do not report. In fact, the think-aloud protocol can slow down teachers' thought processes, which can result in specific details being left out of the teacher’s planning process (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). Comparatively, the survey data were also a limitation in that the data only included self-reported knowledge. However, the semi-structured interview questions tried to substantiate items in the survey by allowing the teachers who participated in the think-aloud and semi-structured interviews to report on what they did when interacting with complex texts. Nevertheless, the teachers’ practices with complex texts were not observed.

Finally, the instruments used to collect data are a limitation. The survey was adapted from an existing survey, and when one modifies an instrument, the original validity and reliability may not hold true (Creswell, 2015). Although this may be true, pilot testing was done to revise items to ensure validity.

Suggestions for Future Research

In an interview with Dana Goldstein in 2017, Lucy Calkins, founder of the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University said, “The Common Core has provided a much-needed “wakeup call” on the importance of rigorous writing, but policy makers “blew it in the implementation. We need massive teacher education.” Another interview conducted by Goldstein in 2017 with Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality revealed a scan of course syllabi from 2,400 teacher preparation programs turned up little evidence that the teaching of writing was being covered in a widespread or systematic way. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted on how teacher preparation programs are
explicitly preparing teachers to teach writing. This has to include K-12 teacher preparation programs. Some elementary teacher programs might include one class on teaching writing, but secondary teaching programs typically do not include any classes. This may explain why many secondary content teachers believe they are not reading and writing teachers. However, since the CCSS and NGSS have rolled out, high school science and social studies teachers must embed writing into their curriculum. Yet, high school content teachers have had little to no professional development on how to teach content-specific writing. Given the rigorous writing tasks that are required on AP English and social studies exams, additional professional development on how to teach writing is needed for teachers so that they can deliver high-quality writing instruction in their content classes.

Future research needs to be conducted on the impact of using multiple-levels of a piece of complex text to increase students’ comprehension and motivation. Utilizing strategies like close reading is not enough for students reading two or more grade levels below expectations. Struggling readers need leveled text at their instructional level. Therefore, additional research is needed to investigate whether providing struggling readers with leveled text impacts reading comprehension and motivation. For example, instead of using novels throughout the academic year, a teacher could use Newsela to provide five levels of text and determine if this increases comprehension and motivation. This would be invaluable data that has the potential to completely change the way teachers select, plan, and teach a piece of complex text.

Finally, additional research needs to be conducted on whether or not using the FLA approach in secondary ELA classrooms improves students’ access to complex text. A year-long study that follows one teacher who has been appropriately trained on FLA, and her students’ outcomes could provide needed data that could significantly modify the way secondary content-
area teachers approach teaching complex text. Furthermore, additional research needs to investigate whether the use of interactional and motivational scaffolds improves students’ ability to grapple with a piece of complex text.

Conclusion

Establishing clear criteria for selecting complex text and designing engaging tasks that increase reading comprehension can make teaching complex text less daunting. For teachers to select and plan for complex text, the diverse needs of students must be considered. Furthermore, time, patience, and practice are needed when teaching students how to interact with and comprehend complex text. With the increased rigor of Standard 10 in the CCSS, students need multiple opportunities on a daily basis to develop and master the skills needed to comprehend a piece of complex text. However, teachers often feel overwhelmed by the vast span of students' reading abilities in their secondary ELA classrooms. The teachers in this study felt ill-equipped to meet all of their students' diverse needs with fidelity in this era of high-stakes testing resulting from the CCSS. Empowering teachers with high-quality professional development and adequate resources to meet the needs of all students is key to increasing students’ reading comprehension.
REFERENCES


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doi:10.1037/0022-0663.92.4.791


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APPENDIX A

SCHOOLOGY INVITATION FOR SURVEY

Dear DPS Secondary Teacher:

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on what criteria secondary teachers, in DPS, use to select and plan for complex text in their English Language Arts classroom. This is a research project being conducted by April Hughes, a student at Northern Illinois University. It should take between 20-25 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer. Everyone who participates in the survey will be entered in a drawing for three $25.00 Amazon gift cards. If you do not finish the survey, your name will still go into the drawing.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, the intended benefits of this study include the potential for secondary level ELA teachers to gain a better understanding of how to select text for instructional strategies that will increase students’ comprehension. There is no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study others than those encountered in day-to-day life.

To ensure your confidentiality, the data will be sent to a link at Qualtrics.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Qualtrics does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether you participated in the study.

At the end of this survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview and think-aloud protocol. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number, email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publication or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

To make it as easy as possible for you to complete the survey, you can complete it on your laptop, desktop, or smartphone. Thank you very much in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please call me at (815) 319-8518 or email me at april_hughes@dpsk12.org.

If I feel I have not been treated according to the descriptions on this form, or that my rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or I have further questions, concerns, or complaints that I wish to address to someone other than the investigator, I may contact Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, at (815) 753-8458. I understand that if I wish further
information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Your completion of this survey implies your consent to participate. Click here to begin: https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bBcX26VEvJvbYbz
APPENDIX B

EMAIL INVITATION FOR CEA MEMBERS

Dear CEA Members,

One of our members, April Hughes, is completing her dissertation research through Northern Illinois University on how ELA teachers determine text-complexity utilizing think-aloud protocol and would love your input. The criteria to participate in the survey are as follows: you must currently be a teacher in Denver Public Schools, which is currently in a 6-12 English Language Arts classroom. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to take. The goal of the research is to present an accurate picture of what criteria ELA teachers use to select text and use it to plan tasks in their classrooms. In addition, the research will aide in making recommendations for ways to strengthen the process that secondary ELA teachers use to select text and tasks for classroom instruction.

All participants will be entered into a drawing for three $25.00 Amazon gift cards. All participants will remain confidential unless they wish to participate in the second phase of the research. Thank you very much in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please call me at (815) 319-8518 or email me at aprilhughes950@gmail.com

If you would like to participate in this survey click here: https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bBcX26VEvJvbYbz

Sincerely,

CEA
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL FOR CEA MEMBERS
Dear CEA Members,

This is a reminder to take a survey from one of our members, April Hughes, who is completing her dissertation research through Northern Illinois University on “How ELA teachers determine text-complexity utilizing think-aloud protocol” and would love your input. The survey window will be open for seven more days. The criteria to participate in the survey are as follows: you must currently be a teacher in Denver Public Schools, which is currently in a 6-12 English Language Arts classroom. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to take. The goal of the research is to present an accurate picture of what criteria ELA teachers use to select text and use it to plan tasks in their classrooms. In addition, the research will aide in making recommendations for ways to strengthen the process that secondary ELA teachers use to select text and tasks for classroom instruction.

All participants will be entered into a drawing for three $25.00 Amazon gift cards. All participants will remain confidential unless they wish to participate in the second phase of the research. Thank you very much in advance for your participation. If you have any questions, please call me at [redacted] or email me at [redacted]

If you would like to participate in this survey click here: [https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bBcX26VEvJvbYbz](https://niu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bBcX26VEvJvbYbz)

Sincerely,

CEA
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEY
You have been invited to participate in a study about how secondary English Language Arts teachers select, plan, and instruction using complex text. This will help inform teacher educators and professional development providers as they help teachers to create and implement tasks for complex texts. Participation in the study involves completing an online survey, which will take about 20 minutes. Participation in this survey is voluntary and no identifying information will be collected. By completing this survey, you are giving consent for your responses to be included in this study.

A summary of the results will be available when data collection and analysis have been completed. To obtain a copy, email the researcher at aprilhughes950@gmail.com or call her at 813-319-8518. If you would like more information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588.
APPENDIX E

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SECOND PHASE OF RESEARCH

To add validity to the survey data, I will also be conducting semi-structured interviews with a think-aloud protocol. If you are interested in participating in the second phase of this research, please provide your name, number, and email address so the researcher can contact you. There will be a $40.00 cash compensation for participation.
APPENDIX F

PHONE SCRIPT FOR CONTACTING POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW AND THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOL

Good morning/afternoon, my name is April Hughes and I’m calling because you indicated on the text complexity survey you completed that you would be interested in participating in the interview and think-aloud protocol portion of my study on how teachers determine text complexity. For the purpose of this study, I am looking for secondary teachers English/language arts. As you indicated on the survey, you meet those criteria. For the semi-structured interview, you will be asked a series of questions that focus on how you plan around selecting and designing activities around complex text. The second part, the think-aloud protocol, will focus on you planning an entire lesson around a complex text. For this activity, we are defining a unit plan as any sequence of two or more lessons on a topic. As you write your plan, say everything that you are thinking. Think of it as “turning up the volume” on all the thoughts, questions, and ideas that pass through your mind during this planning process. Please do not leave anything out. I will be recording your thoughts during this process. This is an unnatural process for people, so I will be providing you with prompts to help you.

I understand that you are very busy, but with your input I hope to be able to present an accurate picture of the process involved in determining text complexity and instructional activities that increase comprehension. If you are interested in participating in the semi-structured interview and think-aloud protocol, you will be compensated $40.00 cash for your time. The entire process should take approximately two-hours. If you would like to participate in the semi-structured interview and think-aloud protocol, we can have an informational meeting either in person or via video chat to go over all the details and any questions you might have. If you are interested, I would like to schedule a time that is convenient for you to be interviewed and participate in the think-aloud protocol. We will determine a place that is convenience for you to conduct the interview and protocol. A local library branch, or your classroom would work.

Thank you very much in advance for your participation.
APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW
AND THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOL

I agree to participate in the research project titled *How Secondary English Language Arts teachers select and plan around complex text* being conducted by April Hughes, a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of the study is to investigate what criteria secondary level ELA teachers consider before selecting specific texts for classroom instruction. Also, this study will explore the approaches that secondary level ELA teachers use to determine the text complexity of instructional activities that will foster in-depth reading comprehension.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following: participate in a think-aloud protocol and be interviewed with audio tape for accuracy, and check researcher field notes and transcriptions of recordings, as requested, to ensure accuracy. The time commitment for the survey is approximately 30-40 minutes, and the think-aloud protocol and interview will last about two hours. All audio recording will be destroyed after the adequate time period has elapsed per IRB requirements.

I acknowledge that I will be compensated $40.00 for participating in the think-aloud protocol and semi-structured interview.

I am aware my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact April Hughes at [redacted], or Drs. Mike Manderino or Elizabeth Wilkins, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, at [redacted]. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588.

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include the potential for you and secondary level ELA teachers to gain a better understanding of how to select text for instructional strategies that will increase students’ comprehension. In addition, I understand that by participating I will gain a deeper understanding of the process of lesson planning for complex text that will increase my ability to select rigorous tasks to align with the text.

I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential by keeping survey data, notes, recorded and transcribed data, and other paperwork in a locked cabinet. Information created and stored electronically will be password protected. All records will be destroyed after the time requirement set by the IRB.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any
legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Participant Signature                      Date

I agree to be audio taped for my interview:

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Participant Signature                      Date
APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL NOTICE

Approval Notice

Initial Review

11-May-2018

TO: April Hughes Curriculum and Instruction


Your Initial Review submission was reviewed and approved under Expedited procedures by Institutional Review Board #1 on 11-May-2018. Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval period: 11-May-2018 - 10-May-2019

If your project will continue beyond that date, or if you intend to make modifications to the study, you will need additional approval and should contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity for assistance. Continuing review of the project, conducted at least annually, will be necessary until you no longer retain any identifiers that could link the subjects to the data collected. Please remember to use your protocol number (HS18-0123) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

Please note that the IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Unless you have been approved for a waiver of the written signature of informed consent, this notice includes a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. NIU policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the NIU IRB. This stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants.

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times, and for retaining the signed consent forms obtained from your subjects for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. Also, the committee recommends that you include an acknowledgment by the subject, or the subject’s representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems or risks to subjects and others. The IRB extends best wishes for success in your research endeavors.
APPENDIX I

IRB CONTINUING REVIEW

Approval Notice

Continuing Review

11-Apr-2019 April Hughes Curriculum and Instruction

RE: Protocol # HS18-0123 “How teachers determine text complexity using think-aloud protocol” Dear April Hughes, Your Continuing Review submission was reviewed and approved under Expedited procedures by Institutional Review Board #1 on 11-Apr-2019. Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval period: 11-May-2019 - 10-May-2020

Please remember to use your protocol number (HS18-0123) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

If you are still recruiting subjects and have not waived the written signature of consent, I have attached a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. NIU policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the NIU IRB. This stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants. If your project will continue beyond that date, or if you intend to make modifications to the study, you will need additional approval and should contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety for assistance. Continuing review of the project, conducted at least annually, will be necessary until you no longer retain any identifiers that could link the subjects to the data collected.

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times, and for retaining the signed consent forms obtained from your subjects in a secure place for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent to participate is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects and others. Please accept my best wishes for success in your research endeavors. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at (815) 753-8588.
APPENDIX J

EMAIL PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY

On Sunday, May 1, 2016, Jon Ostenson <jonathan_ostenson@byu.edu> wrote:

April,

I apologize for the delay in responding. I think we would be fine with you using our survey and would appreciate you giving credit for the original instrument. I’ve attached a Word version of our questions and instructions that we used for participants. The questions aren’t all formatted the way they appeared in the Qualtrics software that we used to deploy the survey, but there’s no easy way to provide you a link to that survey using that platform. If you have specific questions about any of the questions, I’d be glad to try to address those for you.

I hope this is helpful and wish you the best with your dissertation study.

----
Dr. Jon Ostenson
Assistant Professor
Department of English, BYU
4123 JFSB
Provo, UT 84602
801.422.6286
Appendix B: Survey Instrument by Mail / Fax / Internet

The University of New Hampshire Survey Center is conducting a study of the literature and reading curriculum of English teachers in Arkansas in conjunction with the University of Arkansas’ Department of Education Reform. You’ve been selected from the English teachers in your school to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. Please be assured that all of your answers are strictly confidential. They will be combined with answers from other English teachers from across the state, and will not be connected to you in any way. Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may choose to skip any question.

When finished, please return the survey in the included return envelope. If you have any questions, please call us at (800) 786-9760, Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM Eastern Time.

Please Circle the number next to the response you wish to give.

For the following questions please think about the FIRST course referenced on the cover letter that you teach on Monday morning or the first section of that course you teach in the week.

1A. Please confirm the name of that first class: _________________________________

2A. Just to confirm, what grade is this course?
Note: If the section comprises of a mix of grades, please select which grade level the most students are in.

1. 9th Grade / Freshmen 2. 10th Grade / Sophomores 3A. Is this a standard course or an honors course?

1. Standard 2. Honors
4A. How many students were in this class the last time you taught it?

3. 11th Grade / Juniors

________________
5A. Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?
6A. What is the name and date ... or edition ... of the anthology?
7A. About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read?

8A. What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?
9A. What major short story authors do you assign and teach in this class? 10A. What major poets do you assign and teach in this class?
11A. How are these works and/or authors selected? (Circle all that apply)

1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify ________________________________

__________%

12A. On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work in the academic year for this class? _________%

13A. How do you typically organize discussion in this class? (Circle all that apply)


14A. What forms of assessment do you employ? (Circle all that apply)

1. Book reports
2. Book reviews
3. Oral reports
4. Research paper
5. PowerPoint or other media presentations 6. Exams

7. Other - please specify ________________________________

15A. Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly ... in class or outside of class ... in response to assignments? (Circle all that apply)

1. Journal writing 2. Essays
3. Quizzes 4. Other - please specify ________________________________

16A. Do you assign reading to be done at home?
17A. About how many pages per week? _________
18A. Do you require a major research paper?
19A. How much total class time do you allot for it? _________ minutes
20A. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?

5. Other - please specify ____________________________________

21A. What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this first class? Any others?

22A. What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach?

23A. How are these non-fiction works or authors of works selected? (Circle all that apply) 1. By you, the teacher 2. By your department 3. By curriculum decision 4. By students 5. Other - please specify ____________________________________

24A. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any ONE book-length non-fiction work in the academic year in this class? ______________

25A. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?

1. Close reading or New Criticism; 2. Biographical or contextual; 3. Reader response; 4. Multicultural; 5. Other - please specify ____________________________________

26A. What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?

27A. How are these texts selected? (Circle all that apply) 1. By you, the teacher 2. By your department 3. By curriculum decision 4. By students 5. Other - please specify ____________________________________
28A. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one informational text in the academic year in this class?  
The following questions refer to the second course referenced on the cover letter that you teach on Monday morning or  
the first section of that course you teach in the week. If you do not teach a second class, please skip to 1D on Page 6. 1B. Please confirm the name of that course:  
__________________________________________  
2B. Just to confirm, what grade is this course?  
Note: If the section comprises of a mix of grades, please select which grade level the most students are in.  
1. 9th Grade / Freshmen 2. 10th Grade / Sophomores 3. 11th Grade / Juniors 3B. Is this a standard course or an honors course?  
1. Standard 2. Honors  
4B. How many students were in this class the last time you taught it? ____________  
5B. Do you regularly use a literature anthology in this class?  
6B. What is the name and date ... or edition ... of the anthology?  
7B. About what percentage of the selections in the anthology do your students read?  
8B. What novels and plays do you assign and teach in this class?  
9B. What major short story authors do you assign and teach in this class?  
10B. What major poets do you assign and teach in this class?  
11B. How are these works and/or authors selected? (Circle all that apply)  
1. By you, the teacher 2. By your department 3. By curriculum decision 4. By students 5. Other - please specify ___________________________________  
___________%  
12B. On average, what percentage of class time, that is, how many periods or blocks per week, do you spend on any one book-length work in the academic year for this class? ____________%  
13B. How do you typically organize discussion in this class? (Circle all that apply)  
1. Whole class discussions 2. Small discussion groups 3. Prepared teacher questions 4. Student questions 5. Other - please specify ___________________________________  
14B. What forms of assessment do you employ? (Circle all that apply)
1. Book reports
2. Book reviews
3. Oral reports
4. Research paper
5. PowerPoint or other media presentations
6. Exams

7. Other - please specify ________________________________

15B. Do your students do any of the following kinds of writing regularly ... in class or outside of class ... in response to assignments? (Circle all that apply)

1. Journal writing 2. Essays
3. Quizzes 4. Other - please specify ________________________________

16B. Do you assign reading to be done at home?
17B. About how many pages per week? ____________

18B. Do you require a major research paper?
19B. How much total class time do you allot for it? ____________ minutes

20B. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to literary reading and study?

1. Close reading or New Criticism; 2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;

5. Other - please specify ________________________________

21B. What book-length works of literary non-fiction, such as biographies, speeches, essays, diaries, or autobiographies, do you assign and teach in this first class? Any others?

22B. What major authors of essays and speeches do you assign and teach?

23B. How are these non-fiction works or authors of works selected? (Circle all that apply) 1. By you, the teacher

2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify ________________________________

24B. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any ONE book-length non-fiction work in the academic year in this class? ____________
25B. Which of the following approaches might best describe your approach to the reading and study of literary non-fiction?

1. Close reading or New Criticism;
2. Biographical or contextual;
3. Reader response;
4. Multicultural;
5. Other - please specify ________________________________

26B. What major technical or informational texts do you assign and teach in this class?

27B. How are these texts selected? (Circle all that apply) 1. By you, the teacher
2. By your department
3. By curriculum decision
4. By students
5. Other - please specify ________________________________

28B. How many periods or blocks do you spend on any one informational text in the academic year in this class? __________

D1. For how many years have you been teaching English or literature in high school? __________
D2. Do you have a Bachelor’s Degree in English or Literature?
1. Yes 2. No
D3. What is your Bachelor’s Degree in if not in English or Literature? ________________________________
D4. From what college or university did you receive your Bachelor’s Degree? ________________________________
D5. Do you have a Master’s Degree? 1. Yes 2. Yes, but not in English or Literature 3. No
D6. If your Master’s Degree is in English or Literature, is it a MA, a MAT or a MED? 1. MA 2. MAT 3. MED
D7. From what college or university did you receive your Master’s Degree? ________________________________
D8. Do you teach only English or Literature or do you teach other subjects as well?
1. Teach only English / Literature 2. Teach other subjects as well
D9. What is your sex? 1. Male 2. Female
D10. What is your age? ____________________

Those are all of the questions. The results of this study will be published by the University of Arkansas’s Department of Education Reform. Thank you again for your help.
Directions for returning the survey can be found at the beginning of the survey
CCSS Teacher Survey Official

Start of Block: Consent

Q84 You are being invited to participate in this research study of text selection procedures of secondary English/Language Arts teachers. We are professors at Brigham Young University and the University of La Verne and are conducting this survey to find out more about the factors that influence the choices you make in selecting texts for study in the classroom and how those choices may be influenced by the new Common Core State Standards.

Your participation in this study will require the completion of this online survey. This should take approximately 30 minutes of your time. Your participation will be anonymous and you will not be contacted again in the future. By completing the survey, you will be eligible for one of three $20 Amazon.com gift certificates to be awarded randomly after the survey has closed. This survey involves minimal risk to you. The benefits, however, may impact society by helping increase knowledge about how teachers select the texts they use in the classroom.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to answer for any reason. We will be happy to answer any questions you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem you may contact Jon Ostenson at jon_ostenson@byu.edu or Naomi Watkins at nwatkins@laverne.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the IRB Administrator at A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT (801) 422-1461. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants.

The completion of this survey implies your consent to participate. If you choose to participate, please click the “Next” button below to begin the survey. Thank you!

End of Block: Consent

Start of Block: Introduction

Q85 This survey features a number of different tools to collect your responses. To help you successfully complete the survey, we’ll introduce you here to those tools, in case some of them are new or unfamiliar to you.
Many of the questions will ask you to choose from a set of options. You will indicate your choice by clicking with your mouse within one of the circles; once your choice has been successfully registered, the circle will fill. If you select the wrong choice or change your mind, you can simply click in a different circle to clear the original choice. Try this by selecting a choice below.

- I like the color red. (1)
- I like the color blue. (2)
- I like the color green. (3)

Q86 Other questions will present a similar list of choices but will allow you to choose more than one option. Again, to indicate a choice you will click with your mouse within one of the boxes; you may select as many choices as are appropriate for your response to the question. When you choice is registered, a check mark will appear in the box; you can de-select or clear this choice by clicking in the box again. Try this by selecting one or more of the options below.

- I enjoy eating at home. (1)
- I enjoy fine dining. (2)
- I enjoy fast food. (3)

Q87 Some questions will present you with a text box and ask you to type out an answer into the text box. Simply position your mouse cursor in the text box and click inside the box to begin typing. You may move the cursor, select text, edit or add text just as you would in a word processor program. Try this by entering some text in the box below.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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Q88 Some questions will ask you to indicate your response on a sliding scale. In this case, you will be presented with a scale similar to the one you see here. You will indicate your response by clicking on the slider, holding down the mouse button, and moving the slider. You can release the slider by releasing the mouse button. Try this by indicating a response on the slider below.
Note that you can settle the slider between numbers, allowing you to indicate more subtle responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many hours do you spend watching TV per day? ()</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Q89 Finally, some questions will ask you to rank order a set of options; generally, you’ll be asked to place the most important or influential things at the top of the list, with the other items in order of descending importance. To order items, simply “drag and drop” the items in the order you desire (click and hold with your mouse on an item, then move the mouse to move the item in the position you want it, and release the mouse button to “drop” the item). Try this by moving the options in the list below.

Place the fast-food restaurants below in order of their appeal to you, with the most appealing restaurant at the top of the list.

_____ McDonalds (1)
_____ Arbys (2)
_____ Wendys (3)
_____ Taco Bell (4)

Q91 That’s it! You’re now ready to begin the survey. We thank you in advance for your participation and for your open and honest responses.

End of Block: Introduction

Start of Block: General Text Selection Questions

Q1 How do you define “text” as used in a classroom?

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Q2 Which of the following types of literary texts do you have in your classroom library? (some genres have examples to help you identify them)

- novel (e.g., John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*) (1)
- drama (e.g., Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*) (2)
- book-length or epic poem (e.g., Homer’s *The Odyssey*) (3)
- anthology (4)
- short stories (5)
- poems (6)
- literary nonfiction/creative nonfiction (*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote) (7)
- essays (“Politics and the English Language” by George Orwell) (8)
- speeches (e.g., Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream”) (9)
- biographies (10)
- autobiographies (11)
- I don’t have a classroom library (12)
Q3 Which of the following types of literary texts do you use for **instruction in your classroom**? (some genres have examples to help you identify them)

- novel (John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*) (1)
- drama (e.g., Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*) (2)
- book-length or epic poem (Homer’s *The Odyssey*) (3)
- anthology (4)
- short stories (5)
- poems (6)
- literary nonfiction/creative nonfiction (*In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote) (7)
- essays (“Politics and the English Language” by George Orwell) (8)
- speeches (Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream”) (9)
- biographies (10)
- autobiographies (11)
Q4 Which of the following types of informational texts do you have in your classroom library?

- consumer and work place documents (e.g., employee handbooks, warranties) (1)
- articles, editorials, and op-ed's in newspapers and magazines (2)
- reference materials (encyclopedias, dictionaries, grammar handbooks, style handbooks) (3)
- test preparation materials (Kaplan guides, ACT prep books) (4)
- practical “how to” materials (5)
- citizenship materials (legal codes, voting documents, driving manuals, tax information) (6)
- I don’t have a classroom library (7)

Q6 Which of the following types of informational texts do you use for instruction in your classroom?

- consumer and work place documents (e.g., employee handbooks, warranties) (1)
- articles, editorials, and op-ed's in newspapers and magazines (2)
- reference materials (encyclopedias, dictionaries, grammar handbooks, style handbooks) (3)
- test preparation materials (Kaplan guides, ACT prep books) (4)
- practical “how to” materials (5)
- citizenship materials (legal codes, voting documents, driving manuals, tax information) (6)
Q7 Do you have an anthology for your classroom?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:
If Do you have an anthology for your classroom? = Yes

Q8 How frequently do you use this anthology?

- frequently (nearly every day) (1)
- quite often (more than once a week) (2)
- often (once a week) (3)
- occasionally (a few times a month) (4)
- rarely (once every couple of months or less frequently) (5)
- never (6)

Display This Question:
If Do you have an anthology for your classroom? = Yes

Q9 Which anthology do you use? (please give the name and publisher or name of the series you use)

________________________________________________________________
Q10 Who chose this anthology?

- self (1)
- department (2)
- school (3)
- district (4)
- unknown (5)
- other (please specify in the next question) (6)

Q11 Please describe who chose the anthology you use:

________________________________________________________________

Q12 What percentage of the texts you use for instruction in your classroom come from this anthology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage ( )
Q13 How much autonomy do you feel that you have in making decisions about which texts will be used for instruction in your classroom?

- complete autonomy (1)
- a lot of autonomy (2)
- some autonomy (3)
- little autonomy (4)
- no autonomy (5)

Q14 At what level do you feel that most decisions about text selection for your classroom are made?

- national (1)
- state (2)
- district (3)
- department/grade level (4)
- self (5)

Q16 Below are some stakeholders who might have an influence over the selection of texts for use in your classroom. Please order these by how much influence you feel they typically have over your decisions (1 = most influential, 6 = least influential).

- national or federal institutions (1)
- state institutions (2)
- district departments or personnel (3)
- department/grade level personnel (4)
- self (5)
- parents or community members (6)

Q15 What are your thoughts or comments about the level at which decisions about texts in your classroom are made?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Q17 Which of the following factors typically influence your decision to use a specific text in your classroom? (you may mark more than one)

- [ ] author of the text (1)
- [ ] readability level of the text (2)
- [ ] length of the text (3)
- [ ] genre of the text (4)
- [ ] purpose for using the text (5)
- [ ] ease of access to the text (6)
- [ ] inclusion in our anthology (7)
- [ ] copyright issues (8)
- [ ] quality of the writing (9)
- [ ] required by district/curriculum (10)
- [ ] recommendation from someone else (11)
- [ ] cultural significance of a text (12)
- [ ] applicability to curriculum (13)
- [ ] parent or community values or concerns (14)
Q18 Is there a factor (or factors) that influence your decisions about texts that was not included on the above list? If so, please describe that factor here and discuss how much and why it influences your decisions. (If not, you may skip this question.)

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

*Carry Forward Selected Choices from “Which of the following factors typically influence your decision to use a specific text in your classroom? (you may mark more than one)”*

Q93 Previously you indicated a set of factors which influenced your text selection; those factors are listed below. Please evaluate the amount of influence that each of these factors typically plays in your decisions about which texts to use for instruction in your classroom.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Significant Influence (1)</th>
<th>A Lot of Influence (2)</th>
<th>Some Influence (3)</th>
<th>Little Influence (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author of the text (x1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readability level of the text (x2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of the text (x3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genre of the text (x4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose for using the text (x5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of access to the text (x6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion in our anthology (x7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copyright issues (x8)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Required by district/curriculum (x10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recommendation from someone else (x11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural significance of a text (x12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicability to curriculum (x13)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent or community values or concerns (x14)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q20 Which of the following criteria do you use to judge the “quality” of a text? (check all that apply)

- [ ] author (1)
- [ ] presence of multiple levels of meaning (2)
- [ ] complexity of the text’s structure (3)
- [ ] complexity of the vocabulary used (4)
- [ ] presence/quality of illustrations (if applicable) (5)
- [ ] theme (6)
- [ ] plot development (7)
- [ ] character development (8)
- [ ] style (9)
- [ ] cohesiveness (10)
- [ ] award-winning (11)
Q21 When looking for texts to use in classroom instruction, where do you typically look for recommendations or advice? (check all that apply)

☐ other teachers (1)

☐ students (2)

☐ administrators (3)

☐ department chair (4)

☐ professional journals (5)

☐ anthologies (6)

☐ professional web sites (7)

☐ librarians (8)

☐ blogs (9)

☐ email listservs (10)

☐ parents or community members (11)

☐ other (please specify in the next page) (12)

☐ I don’t consult outside sources (13)
Q92 Please describe other outside resources you use in looking for recommendations or advice on choosing texts for classroom study.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Carry Forward Selected Choices from “When looking for texts to use in classroom instruction, where do you typically look for recommendations or advice? (check all that apply)”

Q22 Place the outside sources in order from which you typically rely on most to which you rely on least in making decisions about texts (higher in the list means that source typically has more influence on your decisions).

_____ other teachers (1)
_____ students (2)
_____ administrators (3)
_____ department chair (4)
_____ professional journals (5)
_____ anthologies (6)
_____ professional web sites (7)
_____ librarians (8)
_____ blogs (9)
_____ email listservs (10)
_____ parents or community members (11)
_____ other (please specify in the next page) (12)
_____ I don’t consult outside sources (13)

Q23 What challenges do you face in selecting appropriate texts for your students?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
Q76 The next questions will ask you about your familiarity with the new Common Core State Standards and the suggested text lists provided within that document. You will be asked in these questions to make predictions about future text selection in your classroom based on the common core and new assessments. Although we are asking about future behavior, please be as honest in your predictions as possible.

In 2009, the governors and school superintendents from a majority of states in the US commissioned the creation of standards for a common core to be shared among the states. In 2010, common standards for English language arts and mathematics were released to the public. These standards have since been adopted in over 40 states (including Utah), and the federal government has awarded large grants for the development of assessments to measure students’ performance on these common standards. States that have adopted these standards have agreed to revise their state standards to contain at least 85% of the common standards by the 2014-2015 school year.

In the common core standards for English language arts, the authors include exemplar text lists that list suggested titles of an appropriate complexity for students from K-12. As you answer these next few questions, please keep in mind what the authors of the CCSS say about these lists:

*The following text samples primarily serve to exemplify the level of complexity and quality that the Standards require all students in a given grade band to engage with. Additionally, they are suggestive of the breadth of texts that students should encounter in the text types required by the Standards. The choices should serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select text of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms. They expressly do not represent a partial or complete reading list.*

Q24

How familiar are you with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) exemplar text list?

- I did not know such a list existed (1)
- I knew such a list existed, but I have never looked at it before (2)
- I have looked at the list before (3)
- I have looked not only at the list but also at additional materials in the CCSS (4)
Q63 In general, how much weight do you expect to give the texts on the exemplar text lists from the CCSS in making decisions about text selection for instructional use?

- a lot of weight (1)
- some weight (2)
- little weight (3)
- no weight at all (4)

Q78 Future end-of-level assessment will be tied to CCSS. Given this future, how much influence will these lists have on your text selection decisions? Why or why not? Please explain your thinking in the box below.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Q36 The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Before you proceed to those questions, please indicate below which grade level(s) you teach. You should check more than one if appropriate.
(If you teach classes of mixed levels, please choose the level(s) that represent(s) the majority of your students.)

☐ 7 (1)
☐ 8 (2)
☐ 9 (3)
☐ 10 (4)
☐ 11 (5)
☐ 12 (6)

End of Block: General CCSS Questions

Start of Block: CCSS Exemplar List (6-8)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8

Q100 Below is the list of exemplar texts for grades 6-8. These texts represent, according to the authors of the CCSS, examples of texts of appropriate complexity for students in grades six through eight. Please look over this list before answering the question(s) below.

**Stories**

*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain
*A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L’Engle
*The Dark is Rising* by Susan Cooper
*Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep
*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor
*The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks* by Katherine Patterson
“Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros (from her book *The House on Mango Street*)
Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of the Iliad by Rosemary Sutcliff

Drama
Sorry, Wrong Number by Louise Fletcher
The Diary of Anne Frank: A Play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett

Poetry
“Paul Revere’s Ride” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
“O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman
“Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll
“Twelfth Song of Thunder” (Navajo tradition)
“The Railway Train” by Emily Dickinson
The Song of Wandering Qengus” by William Butler Yeats
“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost
“Chicago” by Carl Sanburg
“I, Too, Sing America” by Langston Hughes
“The Book of Questions” by Pablo Neruda
“Oranges” by Gary Soto
“A Poem for My Librarian, Mrs. Long” by Nikki Giovanni

Informational Texts
“Letter on Thomas Jefferson” by John Adams
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself by Frederick Douglass
“Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: Address to Parliament on May 13th, 1940” by Winston Churchill
Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad by Ann Petry
Travels with Charley: In Search of America by John Steinbeck

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8

Q55
In looking at the above list of CCSS exemplary texts, what are your thoughts, impressions, and/or comments about the list?
Q57
How likely are you to use at least one of the CCSS exemplar texts listed above (that you are not currently using) in your classroom instruction?

- I am certain to use at least one of these texts. (1)
- I am likely to use at least one of these texts. (2)
- I will consider using one of these texts. (3)
- I am unlikely to use one of these texts. (4)
- I doubt I will use one of these texts (5)
- I am certain that I will not use one of these texts. (6)
Q58
How many of the texts that you currently use in your classroom would you replace with texts from this CCSS exemplar text list?

○ all of them (1)
○ most of them (at least 3/4 of my texts) (2)
○ many of them (around half of them) (3)
○ some of them (but not more than half) (4)
○ a few (up to 1/4 of my texts) (5)
○ none of them (6)

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7
Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8

Q79 Please elaborate on your response to the question about how many of your current text selections you would replace with texts from the exemplar list.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7
Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8
Q59
How easy or difficult do you think it would be to find texts for classroom use that are similar to those on this CCSS exemplar text list?

- very difficult (I doubt I would be able to find similar texts) (1)
- difficult (I could find texts but it might take a lot of time and effort) (2)
- challenging (I could find texts but with some difficulty) (3)
- somewhat easy (I could find texts with little difficulty) (4)
- easy (I could relatively quickly come up with similar titles) (5)
- very easy (It would take minimal time or effort to come up with similar titles) (6)

Q60 Please elaborate on your response as to how easy or difficult it would be to find similar texts for classroom use.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8
Q62
On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate how competent you personally feel in your ability to be able to find texts that are comparable to these exemplary texts.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Competence ()

End of Block: CCSS Exemplar List (6-8)

Start of Block: CCSS Exemplar List (9-10)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 9

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 10

Q101 Below is the list of exemplar texts for grades 9-10. These texts represent, according to the authors of the CCSS, examples of texts of appropriate complexity for students in grades six through eight. Please look over this list before answering the question(s) below.

Stories
The Odyssey by Homer
Metamorphoses by Ovid
“The Nose” by Nikolai Gogol
Candide, Or The Optimist by F. A. M. De Voltaire
Fathers and Sons by Ivan Turgenev
“The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry
The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
“I Stand Here Ironing” by Tillie Olsen
Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe
To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee
The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara
The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez
The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak

Drama
Oedipus Rex by Sophocles
The Tragedy of Macbeth by William Shakespeare
A Doll’s House by Henrik Ibsen
"The Glass Menagerie" by Tennessee Williams
*Rhinoceros* by Eugene Ionesco
“*Master Harold*” ... and the boys by Athol Fugard

**Poetry**
“Sonnet 73” by William Shakespeare
“Song” by John Donne
“Ozymandius” by Percy Bysshe Shelley
“The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe
“We Grow Accustomed to the Dark” by Emily Dickinson
“Loveliest of Trees” by A. E. Housman
“Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson
“Yet Do I Marvel” by Countee Cullen
“Musee des Beaux Arts” by Wystan Hugh Auden
“Women” by Alice Walker
“I Am Offering This Poem to You” by Jimmy Santiago Baca

**Informational Texts**
“Speech to the Second Virginia Convention” by Patrick Henry
“Farewell Address” by George Washington
“Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln
“Second Inagural Address” by Abraham Lincoln
“State of the Union Address” by Franklin Delano Roosevelt
“I Am an American Day Address” by Learned Hand
“Remarks to the Senate in Support of a Declaration of Conscience” by Margaret Chase Smith
“I Have A Dream” by Martin Luther King, Jr.
“Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr.
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
“Hope, Despair, and Memory” by Elie Wiesel
“Address to Students at Moscow University” by Ronald Reagan
“A Quilt of a Country” by Anna Quindlen

**Display This Question:**

*If* the next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. *Before... = 9*

*Or* the next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. *Before... = 10*

Q64
In looking at the above list of CCSS exemplar texts, what are your thoughts, impressions, and/or comments about the list?

______________________________________________________________________________________________
Q65
How likely are you to use at least one of the CCSS exemplar texts listed above (that you are not currently using) in your classroom instruction?

- I am certain to use at least one of these texts. (1)
- I am likely to use at least one of these texts. (2)
- I will consider using one of these texts. (3)
- I am unlikely to use one of these texts. (4)
- I doubt I will use one of these texts (5)
- I am certain that I will not use one of these texts. (6)
Q66 How many of the texts that you currently use would you replace with texts from this CCSS exemplar text list?

- all of them (1)
- most of them (at least 3/4 of my texts) (2)
- many of them, around half of them (3)
- some of them, but not more than half (4)
- a few (up to 1/4 of my texts) (5)
- none of them (6)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 9

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 10

Q80 Please elaborate on your response to the question about how many of your current text selections you would replace with texts from the exemplar list.

___________________________________________________________________________
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___________________________________________________________________________
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Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 9

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 10
Q67
How easy or difficult do you think it would be to find texts for classroom use that are similar to those on this CCSS exemplar text list?

- very difficult (I doubt I would be able to find similar texts) (1)
- difficult (I could find texts but it might take a lot of time and effort) (2)
- challenging (I could find texts but with some difficulty) (3)
- somewhat easy (I could find texts with little difficulty) (4)
- easy (I could relatively quickly come up with similar titles) (5)
- very easy (It would take minimal time or effort to come up with similar titles) (6)

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 9
Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 10

Q68 Please elaborate on your response as to how easy or difficult it would be to find similar texts for classroom use.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________
Q69

On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate how competent you personally feel in your ability to be able to find texts that are comparable to these exemplar texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>competence ()</td>
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End of Block: CCSS Exemplar List (9-10)

Start of Block: CCSS Exemplar List (11-CCR)

Q102 Below is the list of exemplar texts for grades 11-12. These texts represent, according to the authors of the CCSS, examples of texts of appropriate complexity for students in grades eleven and above. Please look over this list before answering the question(s) below.

Stories

*The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer
*Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes
*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
“The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allen Poe
*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte
*The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne
*Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
“A White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett
*Bill Budd, Sailor* by Herman Melville
“Home” by Anton Chekov
*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
*As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner
*A Farwell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
“The Garden of Forking Paths” by Jorge Luis Borges
The Adventures of Augie March by Saul Bellow
The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
Dreaming in Cuban by Cristina Garcia
The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri

Drama
Tartuffe by Jean-Baptistie Poquelin Moliere
The Tragedy of Hamlet by William Shakespeare
The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde
Our Town: A Play in Three Acts by Thornton Wilder
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
Death and the King’s Horseman: A Play by Wole Soyinka

Poetry
“A Poem of Changgan” by Li Po
“A Valediction Forbidding Mourning” by John Donne
“On Being Brought From Africa to America” by Phyllis Wheatley
“Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats
“Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman
“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson
“Song VII” by Rabindranath Tagore
“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot
“The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” by Ezra Pound
“Mending Wall” by Robert Frost
“Ode to My Suit” by Pablo Neruda
“Sestina” by Elizabeth Bishop
“The Latin Deli: An Ars Poetica” by Judith Ortiz Cofer
“Demeter’s Prayer to Hades” by Rita Dove
“Man Listening to Disc” by Billy Collins

Informational Texts
Common Sense by Thomas Paine
The Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson
The Bill of Rights (Amendments One through Ten of the United States Constitution)
Walden by Henry David Thoreau
“Society and Solitude” by Ralph Waldo Emerson
“Lee Surrenders to Grant, April 9th, 1865” by Horace Peter
“The Fallacy of Success” by G. K. Chesterton
The American Language, 4th Edition by H. L. Mencken
Black Boy by Richard Wright
“Politics and the English Language” by George Orwell
“Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth” by Richard Hofstadter
Q70
In looking at the above list of CCSS exemplar texts, what are your thoughts, impressions, and/or comments about the list?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 11
Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 12
Q71 How likely are you to use at least one of the CCSS exemplar texts listed above (that you are not currently using) in your classroom instruction?

- I am certain to use at least one of these texts. (1)
- I am likely to use at least one of these texts. (2)
- I will consider using one of these texts. (3)
- I am unlikely to use one of these texts. (4)
- I doubt I will use one of these texts (5)
- I am certain that I will not use one of these texts. (6)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 11

Or The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 12

Q72 How many of the texts that you currently use would you replace with texts from this CCSS exemplar text list?

- all of them (1)
- most of them (at least 3/4 of my texts) (2)
- many of them, around half of them (3)
- some of them, but not more than half (4)
- a few (up to 1/4 of my texts) (5)
- none of them (6)
Q81 Please elaborate on your response to the question about how many of your current text selections you would replace with texts from the exemplar list.

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q73 How easy or difficult do you think it would be to find texts for classroom use that are similar to those on this CCSS exemplar text list?

○ very difficult (I doubt I would be able to find similar texts) (1)

○ difficult (I could find texts but it might take a lot of time and effort) (2)

○ challenging (I could find texts but with some difficulty) (3)

○ somewhat easy (I could find texts with little difficult) (4)

○ easy (I could relatively quickly come up with similar titles) (5)

○ very easy (It would take minimal time or effort to come up with similar titles) (6)
Q74 Please elaborate on your response as to how easy or difficult it would be to find similar texts for classroom use.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Q75 On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate how competent you personally feel in your ability to be able to find texts that are comparable to these exemplar texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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</table>

Q77 You’re almost finished; thank you for your patience. This last set of questions is critical as it asks you for demographic information that will help us contextualized your answers. Please answer these remaining questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Remember that all
information gathered in this survey will be kept confidential and will not be associated with your name or email address.

Q25 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q26 What is your age range?

- 20-25 (1)
- 26-30 (2)
- 31-35 (3)
- 36-40 (4)
- 41-45 (5)
- 46-50 (6)
- 51-55 (7)
- 56-60 (8)
- 61+ (9)
Q27 How many years of overall teaching experience do you have?

- 1-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- 16-20 years (4)
- 20-25 years (5)
- over 25 years (6)

Q28 How many years of teaching experience do you have in English/language arts?

- 1-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- 16-20 years (4)
- 20-25 years (5)
- over 25 years (6)

Q29 Do you have an undergraduate degree in English or Literature?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:
If Do you have an undergraduate degree in English or Literature? = No

Q30 In what was your undergraduate degree?

________________________________________________________________________________________
Q35 Do you hold a master’s degree?

- Yes, in English or Literature (1)
- Yes, in a field besides English or Literature (2)
- No (3)

Display This Question:
If Do you hold a master’s degree? = Yes, in a field besides English or Literature

Q32 In what field was your master’s degree?

________________________________________________________________________

Q34 Do you have a reading endorsement?

- Yes, Level 1 (1)
- Yes, Level 2 (2)
- No, but I am currently enrolled in coursework towards an endorsement (3)
- No (4)

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 7
Q44 How would you characterize your grade 7 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both ELL and honors 7th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

- remedial (1)
- resource (2)
- ESL/ELL (3)
- regular/mainstream (4)
- honors (5)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 8

Q50 How would you characterize your grade 8 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both ELL and honors 8th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

- remedial (1)
- resource (2)
- ESL/ELL (3)
- regular/mainstream (4)
- honors (5)

Display This Question:

If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 9
Q51 How would you characterize your grade 9 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both regular and honors 9th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

☐ remedial (1)

☐ resource (2)

☐ ESL/ELL (3)

☐ regular/mainstream (4)

☐ honors (5)

☐ AP or IB (6)

Display This Question:
If The next set of questions will ask you to look at these exemplar lists for certain grade levels. Bef... = 10

Q52 How would you characterize your grade 10 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both regular and honors 10th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

☐ remedial (1)

☐ resource (2)

☐ ESL/ELL (3)

☐ regular/mainstream (4)

☐ honors (5)

☐ AP or IB (6)
Q53 How would you characterize your grade 11 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both regular and honors 11th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

- remedial (1)
- resource (2)
- ESL/ELL (3)
- regular/mainstream (4)
- honors (5)
- AP or IB (6)
Q54 How would you characterize your grade 12 class(es)? (You may select multiple answers if you teach different sections of the same grade level class. For instance, if you teach both regular and honors 12th grade classes, you would check both boxes.)

☐ remedial (1)

☐ resource (2)

☐ ESL/ELL (3)

☐ regular/mainstream (4)

☐ honors (5)

☐ AP or IB (6)

Q37 Are the courses you teach considered Language Arts or English course?

☐ Language Arts (1)

☐ English (2)

☐ Other (please describe in the next question) (3)

Display This Question:

If Are the courses you teach considered Language Arts or English course? = Other (please describe in the next question)

Q38 Please describe how the courses you teach are titled or considered.

_______________________________________________________________________________________________
Q40 What is the size of the overall student population at the school where you teach?

- less than 500 (1)
- 501-1000 (2)
- 1001-1500 (3)
- 1501-2000 (4)
- 2001-2500 (5)
- 2500+ (6)

Q41 How would you characterize the setting of your school?

- rural (1)
- suburban (2)
- urban (3)

Q42 Think back to your teacher training at the college/university you attended. Did you receive training or instruction on how to select texts for instructional use in your classroom?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:
If Think back to your teacher training at the college/university you attended. Did you receive training... = Yes
Q43 Please rank how useful or effective this training was for your practice.

- very helpful (1)
- helpful (2)
- somewhat helpful (3)
- somewhat unhelpful (4)
- unhelpful (5)
- very unhelpful (6)

End of Block: Demographic Questions

Start of Block: Final

Q82 In order to qualify for the Amazon.com gift card drawing, please enter your name and email address below where we can contact you if you are one of the winners.

In addition, we may contact some participants in this survey in the future for follow-up questions. If you would be willing to participate in a brief follow-up contact regarding this survey, please enter “yes” in the box below; if you would rather not be contacted again, enter “no” or simply leave the box blank. Participation in any follow-up contact is voluntary and even if you share your name and email at this point you are free to decline participation at a future time.

- Your Name (1) ____________________________________________________________
- Email Address (2) ________________________________________________________
- Are you willing to be contacted for followup? (3) __________________________

Q83 Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your responses will provide valuable insights into the process used to select texts for classroom study in the English language arts.

End of Block: Final
APPENDIX M

SURVEY ITEMS

Text Complexity

Start of Block: Block 2

Q1 You have been invited to participate in a study about how secondary English Language Arts teachers select, plan, and instruction using complex text. This will help inform teacher educators and professional development providers as they help teachers to create and implement tasks for complex texts. Participation in the study involves completing an online survey, which will take about 20 minutes. Participation in this survey is voluntary and no identifying information will be collected. By completing this survey, you are giving consent for your responses to be included in this study.

A summary of the results will be available when data collection and analysis have been completed. To obtain a copy, email the researcher at aprilhughes950@gmail.com or call her at 815-319-8518. If you would like more information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588.

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q2 How do you define “text” as used in a classroom?

Q3 How do you define “complex text” as used in your classroom?
Q4 Do you regularly use a textbook or literature anthology in your class?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q5 Is the textbook or literature anthology that you use aligned to the Common Core State Standards?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 Is text purpose a criteria you use to select text for classroom instruction?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
Q7 How are the majority of text selected in your school?

- By you, the teacher (1)
- By your department (2)
- By curriculum decisions (3)
- By students (4)
- Other- please specify (5) ________________________________

Q8 Which of the following types of text do you use for instruction in your classroom? (some genres have examples to help you identify them) Click all that apply.

- novels (John Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men) (1)
- Book-length or epic poems (Homer’s The Odyssey) (2)
- Literature Anthology (3)
- Classroom Textbook (4)
- Short Stories (5)
- Poems (6)
- Informational Text (Scientific Research Report) (7)
- Essays (“Politics and the English Language” by George Orwell) (8)
- Speeches (Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream”) (9)
- Biographies (10)
- Autobiographies (11)
- Primary Source Documents (12)
Q9 Does applicability to the curriculum a factor that influences your decision about the text you use in the classroom?

○ Always (1)
○ Most of the time (2)
○ About half the time (3)
○ Sometimes (4)
○ Never (5)

Q10 Does the quality of writing influence your decision about using a particular text in your classroom?

○ Always (1)
○ Most of the time (2)
○ About half the time (3)
○ Sometimes (4)
○ Never (5)
Q11 Is accessibility, or the ease of access, of a text a factor that influences your decision about using it in the classroom?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q12 Is genre a factor that influences your decision about using a text in the classroom?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q13 Does cultural significance influence your decision about texts?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q14 What level of autonomy in decision making about texts do you feel you have?

- A great deal (1)
- A lot (2)
- A moderate amount (3)
- A little (4)
- None at all (5)

Q15 How much do district/curriculum requirements influence your decision about texts?

- A great deal (1)
- A lot (2)
- A moderate amount (3)
- A little (4)
- None at all (5)

Q16 Do you use Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards to help you select text for classroom instruction?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q17 Does the readability level, or Lexile level, influence your decision about using a certain text in your classroom?

○ Always (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ About half the time (3)

○ Sometimes (4)

○ Never (5)

Q18 Do you use Appendix B in the Common Core Standards to determine the complexity of a text?

○ Always (1)

○ Most of the time (2)

○ About half the time (3)

○ Sometimes (4)

○ Never (5)
Q19 Do you use the Lexile levels in your textbook teachers’ edition to help you select text for classroom instruction?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q20 If you see a Lexile level in your teacher’s edition textbook or literature anthology do you take into consideration the characteristics of the text before deciding if it is appropriate for classroom instruction?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q21 Do you consider the task you are going to use for instruction before deciding on a text for your classroom?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q22 Do you consider the interaction(s) that needs to occur between the reader and text in order for comprehension to occur?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q23 Do you determine what you want students to learn (Learning Outcome) from the text prior to using it in class?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q24 Do you take into consideration the students’ motivation (interest in content, self-efficacy as a reader) for reading a text prior to using it in class?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q25 How often do students annotate text when reading informational or nonfiction text in your class?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q26 Does the goal of close reading and annotation impact how you select text for classroom instruction?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q27 How often do you preview a new text prior to students reading it?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q28 Have you ever used a qualitative rubric to help you determine the complexity of a text?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q29 When planning for instruction, do you treat informational text the same as fiction?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q30 Which of the following approaches best describe your approach to the reading and study of nonfiction, or informational text in your classroom instruction?

- Close/Critical Reading (1)
- Disciplinary Literacy Approach (2)
- Multicultural (3)
- Using QAR (Question-Answer-Response) (4)
- None of the Above. Please Specify (5)

Q31 What do you consider the most challenging aspect(s) of teaching complex text?

Q32 When you are teaching a new topic, how often do you use more than one text to build students’ knowledge?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q33 Prior to selecting a text for classroom instruction do you consider whether or not the text will help to develop the students’ inferencing, visualization, and questioning skills?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q34 In your opinion, what would make teaching complex text easier?

Q35 Do you consider whether readers at this grade level possess the adequate prior knowledge and/or experience regarding this topic of the text to manage the materials presented?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

36 When evaluating a possible text for classroom use do you consider whether or not the text will maintain the reader’s motivation and engagement throughout the reading experience?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q37 When selecting text for classroom instruction do high-stakes assessments factor into your decision?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q38 When previewing a text for classroom instruction do you identify teaching points and develop text-dependent questions during the previewing stage?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q39 What percentage of vocabulary instruction is taught in isolation in your classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10%</td>
<td>Having students use a dictionary (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20%</td>
<td>Vocabulary Worksheets from textbook (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30%</td>
<td>Assigning a list of words and having students look up the definition (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q40 Do you identify that an informational text has an argument that is supported by evidence before selecting it for classroom instruction?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q41 Have you ever used TextEvaluator to determine the dimensions of text complexity for a text?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q42 Have you ever used the Coh-Matrix-derived TextEasibility System to determine text complexity?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q43 Have you used Pennebaker’s Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count in assessing word concreteness as an index of text complexity?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q44 Do you analyze the elements of mean word frequency, mean sentence length, and passage length before determining the complexity of a text?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q45 Do you take into consideration a reader’s performance as a measure of how successful he or she will be when encountering complex text?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q46 Prior to selecting a text, do you consider how text features can influence reader’s meaning-making?

- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)

Q47 How many years of teaching experience do you have?

- 1-5 years (1)
- 6-10 years (2)
- 11-15 years (3)
- 16-20 years (4)
- 21-25 years (5)
- 25+ Years (6)

Q48 What is your gender

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
Q49 How many students attend the school that you teach in?

- fewer than 500 (1)
- 500-1,000 (2)
- 1,001-1,500 (3)
- 1,501-2,000 (4)
- 2,001-2,500 (5)
- 2,500 + (6)

Q50 What is the setting of the school that you teach in?

- Urban (1)
- Suburban (2)
- Rural (3)

Q51 How many classes do you teach at the following levels?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<td>Honors/AP Courses (2)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q52 What is your level of education?

- Bachelor’s (1)
- Masters (2)
- More than one masters (3)
- Doctorate (4)
Q53 What grade level(s) do you teach? If you teach more than one please indicate how many classes per grade level you teach.

Q54 How many classes do you teach at the following levels?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>Standard (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remedial (3)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q55 What grade level(s) do you teach? If you teach more than one please indicate how many classes per grade level you teach.

Q56 To add validity to the survey data I will also be conducting semi-structured interviews with a think-aloud protocol. If you are interested in participating in the second phase of this research, please provide your name, number, and email address so the researcher can contact you. There will be a $40.00 cash compensation for participation.
APPENDIX N

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS THAT ALIGN WITH THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Please explain what grade level(s) and content area(s) that you teach?</td>
<td>Q43 How many years of teaching experience do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How long have you been teaching?</td>
<td>Q44 What is your gender</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q45 How many students attend the school that you teach in?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q46 What is the setting of the school that you teach in?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q47 How many classes do you teach at the following levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q48 What is your level of education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q49 What grade level(s) do you teach? If you teach more than one, please indicate how many classes per grade level you teach.</td>
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<td><strong>What kinds of text do secondary level ELA teachers select for instruction? Does the complexity of the text factor into the decision-making selection? If so, how?</strong></td>
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<td>4. Explain how you take into consideration the reader when you determine tasks and instructional strategies to support student learning from text.</td>
<td>Q2 Do you regularly use a textbook or literature anthology in your classroom?</td>
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<td>9. When selecting tasks for a text that you want to use in the classroom, how do you determine how much “frontloading” or activating of prior knowledge needs to be done?</td>
<td>Q3 Is the textbook or literature anthology that you use aligned to the CCSS?</td>
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<td>10. What is the process that you use to determine what students’ reading interests are?</td>
<td>Q4 Is text purpose criteria you use to select text for classroom instruction?</td>
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<td>Q5 How are the majority of text selected in your school?</td>
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<td>Q6 Which of the following types of text do you use for instruction in your classroom?</td>
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<td>Q7 Does applicability to the curriculum a factor that influences your decision about the text you use in the classroom?</td>
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<td>Q8 Does the quality of writing influence your decision about using a particular text in your classroom?</td>
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<td>Q9 Is accessibility, or the ease of access, of a text a factor that</td>
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Q10 Is genre a factor that influences your decision about using a text in the classroom?
Q11 Does cultural significance influence your decisions about texts?
Q12 What level of autonomy in decision making about texts do you feel you have?
Q13 How much do district/curriculum requirements influence your decision about texts?
Q14 Do you use Appendix A in the CCSS to help you select text for classroom instruction?
Q15 Does the readability level, or Lexile level, influence your decision about using a certain text in your classroom?
Q16 Do you use Appendix B in the CCSS to determine the complexity of a text?
Q17 Do you use Lexile levels in your teachers’ edition to help you select text for classroom instruction?
Q18 If you see a Lexile level in your teacher’s edition textbook or literature anthology do you take into consideration the characteristics of the text before deciding if it is appropriate for classroom instruction?
Q19 Do you consider the task you are going to use for instruction before deciding on a text for your classroom?
Q20 Do you consider the interaction(s) that needs to occur between the reader and text for comprehension to occur?
Q21 Do you determine what you want students to learn (Learning Outcome) from the text before using it in class?
Q22 Do you take into consideration the students’ motivation (interest in content, self-efficacy as a reader) for reading a text before using it in class?
How do ELA secondary level teachers determine text complexity for materials utilized for classroom instruction activities to develop in-depth reading comprehension?

3. Explain how you take into consideration the reader when you determine tasks and instructional strategies to support student learning from text.
5. What is the process you use to determine what students’ reading interests are?
6. Explain how you take into consideration the reader when you determine tasks and instructional strategies to support student learning from text.
7. When selecting tasks for a text that you want to use in the classroom, how do you determine how much “frontloading” or activating of prior knowledge needs to be done?
8. What is the process that you use to determine what students’ reading interests are?

Q1 How do you define “text” as used in a classroom?
Q23 How often do students annotate text when reading informational or nonfiction text in your class?
Q24 Does the goal of close reading and annotation impact how you select text for classroom instruction?
Q25 How often do you preview a text before students reading it?
Q26 Have you ever used a qualitative rubric to help you determine the complexity of a text?
Q27 When planning for instruction, do you treat informational text the same as fiction?
Q28 Which of the following approaches best describe your approach to the reading and study of nonfiction or informational text in your classroom instruction?
Q33 When selecting text for classroom instruction do high-stakes assessments factor into your decision?
Q37 Have you ever used TextEvaluator to determine the dimensions of text complexity for a text?
Q38 Have you ever used the Coh-Matrix-derived TextEasibility Systems to determine text complexity?
Q39 Have you used Pennebaker’s Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count in assessing word concreteness as an index of text complexity?
Q40 Do you analyze the elements of mean word frequency, mean sentence length, and passage length before determining the complexity of a text?

Q29 When you are teaching a new topic, how often do you use
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<th>strategies to support student learning from the text?</th>
<th>more than one text to build students’ knowledge?</th>
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<td>Q30 before selecting a text for classroom instruction do you consider whether the text will help to develop the students’ inferencing, visualization, and questioning skills?</td>
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<td>Q31 Do you consider whether readers at this grade level possess the adequate prior knowledge and/or experience regarding this topic of the text to manage the materials presented?</td>
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<td>Q32 When evaluating a possible text for classroom use do you consider whether or not the text will maintain the reader’s motivation and engagement throughout the reading experience.</td>
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<td>Q34 When previewing a text for classroom instruction do you identify teaching points and develop text-dependent questions during the previewing stage?</td>
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<td>Q35 What percentage of vocabulary instruction is taught in your classroom?</td>
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<td>Q36 Do you identify that an informational text has an argument that is supported by evidence before selecting it for classroom instruction?</td>
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<td>Q41 Do you take into consideration a reader’s performance as a measure of how successful he or she will be when encountering complex text?</td>
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<td>Q42 Prior to selecting a text, do you consider how text features can influence reader’s meaning-making?</td>
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APPENDIX O

THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOL
(Di Domenico, 2014; Geisler, 1994; Peskin, 1998)

Directions (will be read aloud by researcher):
During this protocol, I am going to ask you to think aloud while you are constructing a unit plan. For this activity, we are defining a unit plan as any sequence of two or more lessons on a topic. As you write your plan, say everything that you are thinking. Think of it as “turning up the volume” on all the thoughts, questions, and ideas that pass through your mind during this planning process. Please do not leave anything out. I will be recording your thoughts during this process. After the think-aloud protocol and the semi-structured interview is complete, I will send it off to a transcriptionist to transcribe. I will email you a copy of the transcripts to review and make any necessary adjustments.
Please take as much time as you need when planning. After two hours, I will stop recording (whether you are finished or not). If you are not finished with the unit, I will ask follow-up questions during the interview. This would allow you time to explain how you would finish the unit if there were additional time.
Due to the nature of the think-aloud process, initially, it can seem awkward and unnatural. To help with this adjustment, we will practice the protocol by checking your email. The goal is to ensure that both of us are comfortable with the process before we begin.
At the beginning of the planning, please describe your course you are planning for, the grade level of the students, and the purpose of the unit. Do you have any questions?
Gather all of the materials you need for the planning, and we will begin when you are ready.

During the think-aloud, if the participant is not sharing his or her thinking for two minutes, the researcher will probe him or her with statements such as:

- Please share your thinking.
- Please share your thoughts.
- Please feel free to speak as you are working.
- Share anything that is running through your mind at this moment.

The researcher will also place an index card with “Share your thinking” written on it in the participant’s workspace.
APPENDIX P

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please explain what grade level(s) and content area(s) that you teach?

2. How long have you been teaching?

3. Explain how you take into consideration the reader when you determine tasks and instructional strategies to support student learning from text.

4. When selecting tasks for a text that you want to use in the classroom, how do you determine how much “frontloading” or activating of prior knowledge needs to be done?

5. What is the process that you use to determine what students’ reading interests are?

6. Has the implementation of the CCSS changed the way you select text for classroom instruction? If so, how?

7. How much time do you spend previewing a text to determine which tasks or instructional strategies will be necessary to support student learning?

8. Do you use different levels of texts (on the same topic) in your classroom to help match the readers to the tasks?

9. Do you use excerpts or passages of texts for specific tasks in your classroom? If so, can you give examples?

Do you use the tasks and instructional strategies that are in your teacher’s manual to plan for classroom instruction? If so, please explain how you pick the ones that you use?
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2. How long have you been teaching?

3. Explain how you take into consideration the reader when you determine tasks and instructional strategies to support student learning from text.

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