CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Structured Literacy and Poor-Reader Profiles

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Ms. Cuffe, a district administrator for a highly diverse suburban school district, was dismayed. The district was strongly committed to a response-to-intervention (RTI) model, sometimes termed *multi-tiered systems of support* (MTSS). Among other features, this model provides universal screening of all children for reading difficulties, with early intervention for at-risk and struggling readers, and with increased intensity of intervention for children who do not respond adequately to initial interventions. However, recent data from the intervention programs across elementary schools in Ms. Cuffe's district indicated that the outcomes of intervention were often poor. Many students made limited progress despite months or even years of intervention. Others appeared to make progress initially but failed to build reading fluency or struggled with other areas of literacy, such as written expression, later on. Ms. Cuffe had particular concerns that the interventions in use in the district schools were not consistent with research findings on the needs of poor readers. She had done some reading about Structured Literacy (SL) approaches to intervention, as well as observed SL interventions in a neighboring town. Ms. Cuffe thought that these interventions might be much more effective for the struggling readers in her district than the ones currently in use. In a meeting with a group of the district's K–6 literacy interventionists, she broached the idea of implementing SL.

Several of the literacy interventionists were doubtful. "Isn't Structured Literacy all about phonics?" said one. "Some of our poor readers do need phonics, but many of them need a focus primarily on comprehension, especially those in grades 4, 5, and 6. How is Structured Literacy going to do anything for those children?"

"Yes," chimed in a second educator. "Isn't Structured Literacy mainly for kids with dyslexia?"

     "I really don't like the idea of using just one program for all students,"
said another, shaking her head. "Poor readers have different needs."

The topic of this book involves SL interventions for children with reading difficulties. As the different chapters in the book illustrate—and as Ms. Cuffe was eventually able to convince the literacy interventionists in her meeting—SL approaches do not involve just one particular commercial program or method, and they are not only for students with one type of reading difficulty or disability. Nor are they only about teaching phonics. *Structured Literacy* is an umbrella term for a range of interventions that share certain instructional features and content. These interventions can be highly effective for a variety of struggling readers, including those whose difficulties center on comprehension, as well as decoding. SL interventions include teaching not only foundational literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling, but also higher-level components of literacy, such as reading comprehension and written expression.

     SL interventions can be valuable tools for many types of practitioners, including reading specialists, RTI/MTSS interventionists, special educators, and classroom teachers. Information about these interventions can also assist professionals who are involved in planning or overseeing systems of interventions, such as Ms. Cuffe. This chapter provides a foundation for the remainder of the book, by discussing the content and key features of SL, by differentiating SL from other commonly used approaches to reading instruction, and by explaining common profiles of reading difficulties. Knowledge of common poor-reader profiles is very useful for targeting interventions appropriately and can help readers of this book determine which chapters are particularly relevant for a given poor reader.

CONTENT AND KEY FEATURES OF SL

The term *Structured Literacy* was adopted by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA; 2019, 2020) to describe a set of instructional approaches and interventions with certain characteristics. The content of SL involves literacy-related skills and components of oral language that play key roles in literacy development and figure prominently in various types of literacy difficulties (Berninger et al., 2006; Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2019; Foorman et al., 2016; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; Seidenberg, 2017). The content of SL includes:

- *phonemic awareness*, awareness of individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words and the ability to manipulate these sounds;
- *phonics*, knowledge of letter–sound (grapheme–phoneme) correspondences in English and the ability to apply this knowledge in decoding unfamiliar printed words;
- *orthography*, knowledge about common spelling patterns in English;
- *morphology*, knowledge about meaningful word parts, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes;

- *syntax*, or sentence structure; and
- *semantics*, meaning at the level of words (i.e., vocabulary), sentences, and longer discourse, such as paragraphs and longer text.

The fact that IDA introduced the term *Structured Literacy* might lead some educators to conclude that these approaches are intended uniquely for students with dyslexia, a type of learning disability that centers on problems in learning to decode and spell printed words (Fletcher et al., 2019). SL interventions can certainly benefit these children. However, SL interventions are not intended solely for this student population, and they can be effective for many other poor readers as well. Individual SL interventions may differ from one another in some ways—for example, in the extent to which they incorporate multisensory activities, such as repeated tracing and saying of letter sounds or printed words. However, all SL approaches share a core set of instructional features, which are summarized in Table 1.1.

First, all SL interventions emphasize explicit, systematic instruction. *Explicit* means that important skills are taught directly, with modeling and clear explanation by the teacher; children are not expected to learn important skills solely from exposure or induction. Clear explanation is concise and avoids excessive wordiness. *Systematic* means that there is a planned sequence of instruction, one that gradually progresses from simpler to more complex skills. Children learn to decode and spell consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) words, such as *map* and *fit*, before learning to decode or spell incrementally more difficult short vowel words, such as *branch* and *twist*, and certainly before complex two-syllable or multisyllabic words. Likewise, in the domain of writing, children learn to write correct sentences before being expected to produce lengthy pieces of writing. Systematic teaching does not mean that teachers must always adhere rigidly to a sequence, without the capacity to make adaptations to meet individual students' needs. However, having a clear scope and sequence can help promote efficiency of instruction (Fletcher et al., 2019) and ensure that children attain the prerequisites they need to learn more advanced skills.

Attention to prerequisite skills is a key feature of SL interventions, not only in relation to children's progress through a planned sequence of skills but also in the planning of everyday instructional activities. For instance, in explaining the meaning of new vocabulary words or of a syntactically complex sentence, SL teachers avoid using language that children may not understand. SL teachers also provide prompt, targeted feedback to children's mistakes. When children are reading a text, teachers ask questions during the reading, instead of waiting only until the end, so that potential misunderstandings can be addressed right away; in writing activities, teachers provide feedback that is specific and unambiguous, so that children are not confused about how to make revisions.

SL approaches emphasize planned, purposeful selections of instructional examples, tasks, and texts. These selections attempt to avoid unnecessary confusion, enhance students' chances of success, and maximize progress. To put it another way, SL approaches emphasize "instructional design that minimizes the learning challenge" (Fletcher et al., 2019, p. 101), again seeking the most efficient, as well as effective, instruction.

TABLE 1.1. Features of Structured Literacy

Feature	What it means	Example(s)
Explicit teaching	Key skills are directly taught, modeled, and clearly explained by the teacher	Teacher clearly models and explains how to segment a simple word into phonemes; how to apply a comprehension strategy, such as summarization
Systematic teaching	Instruction follows a planned, logical sequence, simple to complex	Children learn how to spell simple consonant–vowel–consonant words before spelling short vowel words with consonant blends; how to write correct sentences before writing paragraphs
Attention to prerequisite skills	Instruction considers prior skills needed to complete or understand a more advanced task	In teaching the meaning of a new vocabulary word, teacher uses clear definitions with words children will know
Targeted, unambiguous, prompt feedback	Teacher provides timely feedback to children's mistakes that helps children correct errors and avoid similar mistakes in the future	Teacher asks questions during children's text reading, with prompt clarification of misunderstandings as needed
Planned, purposeful choices of examples, tasks, and texts	Examples of words, instructional tasks, and texts for reading/writing are carefully chosen to fit children's current skills and avoid confusion	Phonics activities avoid the use of phonetically irregular words; children with limited decoding skills read phonetically controlled (decodable) texts
Synthetic-phonics approach at grapheme–phoneme level for initial phonics and spelling instruction	Initial approach emphasizes grapheme–phoneme correspondences and blending rather than larger units (e.g., whole words, onset–rime)	Children learn to decode a word, such as *shack,* by learning phonemes associated with the graphemes *sh*, *a*, and *ck,* and how to blend the phonemes into the correct word
Consistent application of skills and teaching for transfer	Children are expected to apply skills they have learned to varied and increasingly complex tasks, with tasks chosen to facilitate application of those skills	During oral reading of text, teacher draws children's attention to decoding errors and has child correct them; in writing activities, children are expected to spell previously learned words correctly
Data-based decision making	Assessments are used on a continuing basis to target interventions, monitor progress, and make needed adjustments	Assessments help a teacher target the specific comprehension weaknesses of a poor comprehender

Efficiency matters when students are behind and progress must be accelerated. Suppose, for instance, that a teacher is presenting a phonics lesson on one-syllable words with a closed pattern. These are words that have a single vowel and end in a consonant, such as *lap*, *inch*, and *stuck*, in which the vowel has a short sound. In this activity, an SL teacher avoids using examples that are phonetically irregular (e.g., *what* and *of*), as well as regular words containing vowel patterns that children have not yet learned, such as *charm* and *light*. Such words are likely to create confusion because they do not have a short vowel sound. These types of words will eventually be taught, of course, but in a planned, systematic way that minimizes potential confusion.

As another example, in SL interventions, children at the beginning levels of decoding usually read phonetically controlled (decodable) texts—texts emphasizing certain phonics patterns that children have been taught. Decodable texts provide children with practice in applying phonics skills and help to build fluency. These texts also discourage a habit of guessing at words that may develop when a child is reading texts with many difficult-to-decode words and with pictures that encourage guessing. For children whose reading problems center on comprehension rather than decoding, texts are also chosen in a purposeful way—for instance, to facilitate application of a particular comprehension strategy that children have been taught (e.g., summarization) or to ensure that the vocabulary and background knowledge demands of the text are a reasonable match for the child's skills—not too easy, not too difficult.

SL approaches not only teach phonics skills explicitly and systematically; typically, they emphasize a particular approach to teaching phonics, a synthetic-phonics approach beginning at the grapheme–phoneme level. This approach focuses initially on having children learn grapheme–phoneme correspondences—that is, relationships between individual letters or letter patterns (graphemes) and phonemes, or the smallest unit of speech sound in a word. Children also learn how to blend phonemes into a whole word, using an instructional sequence that begins with the simplest, easiest-to-blend words (e.g., *sun*) and progresses gradually through more difficult word patterns. To decode a word such as *shack*, children would learn that the *sh* grapheme corresponds to the phoneme /sh/, the grapheme *a* to short /a/ as in *at*, and the grapheme *ck* to /k/, as well as how to blend those phonemes to form the spoken word *shack*.

Synthetic phonics at the grapheme–phoneme level does not mean teaching all words through letter-by-letter decoding, which does not work well for most English words. Even at the beginning of phonics instruction, children must learn grapheme–phoneme correspondences for some common letter patterns, such as *sh*, *th*, *ck*, and so on. The point is that initial phonics instruction is at the phoneme level, not at the whole-word level (e.g., inducing phonics relationships from word families, such as *shack*, *back*, *pack*), and not at the onset–rime level (e.g., learning larger intrasyllabic units, such as *sh*, *tr*, *bl*, *-ack*, *-ap*, *-ick*, *-ip*, and blending those larger parts). In this approach, as in other phonics approaches, children must eventually learn to attend to larger letter patterns in words, including common morphemes (e.g., suffixes such as *-ing*, *-ed*, *-ful*). However, the *initial* approach to decoding unfamiliar printed words emphasizes grapheme–phoneme-level correspondences, which forces close attention to the internal details of

words, and which also facilitates integration of phonemic awareness instruction, as explained in detail by Al Otaiba, Allor, and Stewart (Chapter 2, this volume).

Another important feature of SL is an emphasis on consistent application of learned skills to a variety of tasks, including more advanced types of tasks over time, and with these tasks chosen in ways to facilitate such application. Sometimes this feature is termed "teaching for transfer" (Wanzek, Al Otaiba, & McMaster, 2020, pp. 6–7). For example, SL teachers do not ignore errors in a child's oral text reading simply because they fit the context (e.g., *a* for *the*, *this* for *that*, or *mom* for *mother*). Instead, teachers encourage careful attention to the print and application of phonics skills. Texts must also be selected in a purposeful way, to match children's current level of phonics skills—if texts contain numerous words that children cannot decode, children have few options but to guess. Some review of previously taught skills is always a part of SL lessons, but cumulative review is also built into SL interventions in a comprehensive way, through consistent application of learned skills to a variety of tasks and purposeful selections of examples, tasks, and texts.

Finally, appropriate assessment is essential to SL interventions. SL approaches use data-based decision making. They employ appropriate assessments to identify reading problems early, to target interventions correctly, to monitor children's progress, and to refine and adjust interventions as needed, on an ongoing basis. For example, with poor readers whose difficulties center on reading comprehension, SL teachers use assessment to clarify individual children's specific difficulties within the domain of comprehension, such as vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, or understanding of text structure. This information is then used to plan initial intervention, with ongoing monitoring of children's progress in reading comprehension and adjustments in intervention if a student is failing to progress adequately.

Although multiple interventions fall under the umbrella of SL, some approaches to instruction and intervention are not compatible with SL. These include approaches that emphasize allocating substantial amounts of classroom or intervention time to independent work or having children choose most of their own instructional tasks and texts; these practices make explicit, systematic teaching difficult at best. Similarly, approaches with a heavily constructivist orientation that emphasize having children induce important skills and concepts with little or no explicit, systematic teaching, are generally incompatible with SL. SL approaches are also incompatible with the three cueing systems model of reading (e.g., Clay, 1994; Goodman, 1976), which has been influential in teacher education and early reading instruction (see Hanford, 2019). This model maintains that, rather than attending closely to all the letters in a word, good readers use semantic (meaning) and syntactic (sentence structure) cues, in conjunction with partial letter cues, such as the first and last letter of a word, to read words. As discussed further in the next section, research does not support the three cueing systems model of reading, and many practices associated with it are problematic, especially for poor readers.

Archer and Hughes (2011) point out that explicit, systematic teaching is sometimes cast as boring, soulless instruction that does not engage children or inspire the motivation to read and write. Motivation and engagement are indeed important. Even the

best intervention cannot be successful if the teacher is unable to engage the students' attention. Moreover, struggling readers can gain many long-term benefits from being motivated to read independently for enjoyment, such as increases in fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge (Mol & Bus, 2011). However, helping poor readers succeed in literacy is vital to motivating them, because repeated failure is not motivating to most people. SL interventions can be implemented in ways that are not only effective and efficient but also highly engaging. Children can use manipulatives, such as counters and letter tiles, to learn about phonemic awareness and phonics skills; they can use word cards to sort various patterns to learn about spelling; and they can develop their writing skills in the context of rich, engaging oral discussions. The chapters that follow provide many examples of SL interventions that can be highly motivating and engaging to struggling students.

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR SL

Content

Numerous research studies, literature reviews, and meta-analyses (Berninger et al., 2006; Foorman et al., 2016; NRP, 2000; Seidenberg, 2017; Stanovich, 2000) provide strong support for the content of SL approaches. This research has established that learning to read and write is based heavily in language processes, such as phonemic awareness, syntactic competence, vocabulary knowledge, and broad oral language comprehension. These studies have also shown that good word recognition skills are an essential foundation for text reading fluency and more advanced reading comprehension. Contrary to the claims of the three cueing systems model, the development of proficient reading is not a matter of learning to use context cues in conjunction with partial letter cues to read words. Rather, progress in early reading is driven by close attention to letter sequences in printed words and the development of highly accurate, automatic word reading (NRP, 2000; Seidenberg, 2017; Stanovich, 2000). Although some poor decoders may be able to compensate for their decoding problems by relying on sentence or picture context, especially at early grade levels, this strategy does not work well as children advance in school and the texts become more demanding (Spear-Swerling, 2015). It is important for teachers to recognize a pattern of overreliance on context—for example, a child who frequently guesses at words based only on the first few letters and sentence context or pictures—as a sign of risk in reading (Moats & Foorman, 2003).

Written English involves a complex orthography in which letters and sounds have a largely consistent, but not always transparent, relationship. English orthography contrasts with Spanish and some other alphabetic orthographies, in which there is a mostly one-to-one mapping between letters and sounds. The letter *a* in Spanish almost always corresponds to the sound heard in *taco*, but in English, the letter *a* can correspond to varied sounds, including the short sound as in *cat*, the long sound as in *cake*, a schwa sound as in *ago*, and so forth. These sounds are quite predictable in most English words, but they require attention to letter patterns and their position in words, as opposed to letter-by-letter decoding. As an example, the *a* in *cake* has a long sound (i.e., says its

name) because it is part of a vowel–consonant–final *e* (VC*e*) pattern that ends the word. Despite some exceptions, such as *done*, most one-syllable words with a *vce* pattern follow the same generalization as *cake*, with the first vowel long and the final *e* silent. Likewise, a given sound in English, such as long /a/, frequently can be represented by multiple spellings, not only *a*–consonant–*e* as in *cake* but also the single letter *a* as in *table*, *ay* as in *play*, *ai* as in *train*, *ei* as in *vein*, and others, a characteristic that makes English spelling particularly challenging to struggling students.

Written English represents morphological as well as grapheme–phoneme relationships. For instance, although the letter *s* most often says /s/, when *s* is indicating a plural—as in *dogs*, *bones*, and *pins*—it is sometimes pronounced /z/. Even in the very early stages of learning, children have to understand these basic morphological relationships in order not to misspell the word *dogs* as *dogz* and *pins* as *pinz*. At advanced stages of reading and spelling, attending to common roots, affixes, and other aspects of morphology becomes even more important. Without some understanding of morphology, a child might reasonably spell *healthy* as *helthy* and *psychology* as *sikology*. All of these types of knowledge—phonics, orthography, and morphology—are essential in order for children to attain advanced levels of word recognition and spelling in English (Moats, 2020; Seidenberg, 2017).

A widely referenced scientific model of reading development, one that includes the abilities and types of knowledge discussed above, is the simple view of reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990). This model emphasizes that two broad factors are important to reading comprehension: word recognition and oral language comprehension. The word recognition factor taps skills such as phonemic awareness, which is required to grasp the alphabetic principle and begin to develop skills for decoding unfamiliar words, phonics knowledge, orthographic knowledge, and morphology. The oral language comprehension factor taps areas such as vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, and discourse comprehension. To have good reading comprehension, a child must have good abilities in both word recognition and oral language comprehension. Conversely, reading difficulties are commonly based in one, or both, factors. The individual component abilities required for skilled reading also interact, and some contribute to both factors in the simple view. For example, morphology plays a role in vocabulary development, as well as in word reading and spelling (Carlisle, 2010). Developing highly skilled reading requires building fluent use and coordination of a wide range of reading-related abilities over many years (Scarborough, 2002).

Instructional Features

Features of SL involving explicit and systematic teaching, prompt and targeted feedback, and data-based decision making are highly consistent with research on effective methods of intervention for poor and at-risk readers in general (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2019; Gersten et al., 2008; NRP, 2000). They also reflect research findings on effective ways to intensify interventions for poor readers who are not responding sufficiently to initial interventions (Wanzek et al., 2020). These features of intervention can enhance children's progress in various components of reading, as well as written

expression. For example, research supports not only explicit teaching of foundational reading skills, such as phonemic awareness and phonics (Foorman et al., 2016; NRP, 2000), but also of certain research-based reading comprehension strategies (e.g., activating prior knowledge, questioning, and summarization) and of text structure (e.g., teaching the structure of narrative texts, as well as various informational text structures) (NRP, 2000; Shanahan et al., 2010). In written expression, studies support the explicit teaching of foundational writing skills, such as handwriting, spelling, and sentence structure, as well as important writing processes, including planning and revision (Graham et al., 2012).

Poor readers with experientially based reading problems, as well as those with intrinsic learning difficulties or disabilities, can benefit from features of SL, such as explicit, systematic teaching. For instance, English learners who are poor readers benefit from appropriately targeted interventions that combine explicit teaching of foundational reading skills with explicit teaching of English vocabulary and other language skills (Baker et al., 2014). However, students with severe and persistent reading disabilities typically require substantially more intensity of intervention than do other poor readers (Fletcher et al., 2019; Vaughn, Denton, & Fletcher, 2010). Greater intensity of intervention is often operationalized in terms of more intervention time, a smaller group size, and greater frequency of progress monitoring, although it can also include other variables, such as increasing the amount of instructional scaffolding provided by the teacher and opportunities for practice (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010).

As noted in Table 1.1, SL approaches generally use a particular approach to phonics instruction, a synthetic-phonics approach with initial instruction at the grapheme–phoneme level. The meta-analysis of the NRP (2000) found clear benefits for explicit, systematic phonics teaching as compared to no or incidental phonics teaching but was not able to differentiate the effectiveness of various systematic phonics approaches. However, post-NRP research has found greater benefits for synthetic-phonics approaches in which initial instruction starts at the grapheme–phoneme level, as compared to other phonics approaches (Brady, 2011, 2020; Christensen & Bowey, 2005). In particular, synthetic–phonics approaches at the grapheme–phoneme level appear to yield greater benefits than other phonics approaches for more demanding reading and spelling tasks, such as children's accuracy and speed of reading transfer (i.e., unfamiliar) words (Brady, 2011). Also, synthetic-phonics approaches at the grapheme–phoneme level incorporate phoneme blending and segmentation—phonemic awareness skills known to be important to the development of decoding and spelling skills—whereas with other types of phonics approaches, supplementary phonemic awareness training may be needed (Johnston & Watson, 2004). If necessary, children may begin phonemic awareness instruction by using cubes or other counters without letters, but as they learn letters and develop skill in identifying the initial phoneme in a word, and then all phonemes in simple words, they transition to using letter tiles to represent phonemes.

There is widespread agreement among researchers that opportunities for children to apply their developing decoding skills in reading appropriate texts is a key aspect of effective intervention (Fletcher et al., 2019; Kilpatrick, 2015). Therefore, in addition to synthetic-phonics intervention, poor readers with needs in this area should also have

ample practice in text reading, including reading aloud with the guidance of a teacher who provides targeted feedback to their decoding mistakes.

SOME SAMPLE SL AND NON-SL PRACTICES

This section of the chapter provides several detailed examples of specific SL practices and contrasts them with some non-SL practices—including those common in three cueing systems approaches—for the same areas of literacy (see also Moats, 2017, 2020; Spear-Swerling, 2018).

Decodable and Predictable Texts

Decodable texts are used as part of SL interventions, especially with children whose problems involve specific word recognition difficulties (SWRD) and mixed reading difficulties (MRD), and who are at relatively early stages of decoding. Predictable texts are not used in SL interventions. Figure 1.1 contrasts the first few pages of a sample decodable text with the initial pages of a sample predictable text.

Both texts in Figure 1.1 are intended for children at beginning reading levels, who would generally be learning to decode the simplest word type: CVC words. For each text, the figure indicates how pictures are used to enhance comprehension or motivation, as well as the types of words used in the text, including CVC words, high-frequency

Decodable text	Predictable text
Ben has a tan cat. The cat is Max. [picture of smiling boy with cat]	Good morning! It's time to have breakfast. What does Nicholas want to eat? [picture of smiling boy at table]
Ben has a lot of fun with Max. [picture of Ben and Max playing]	He can eat oatmeal. [picture of bowl of oatmeal]
Max likes to sit on a red rug in the den. [picture of Max on the rug]	He can eat waffles. [picture of waffles on a plate]
A big bug is on the rug near Max. [picture of bug]	He can eat bacon. [picture of bacon on a plate]
Max sees the bug run by him. [picture of Max looking startled]	He can eat scrambled eggs. [picture of scrambled eggs on a plate]
CVC words: *Ben, has, tan, cat, is, Max, lot, fun, sit, on, red, rug, in, den, big, bug, run, him* High-frequency words (not CVC): *a, the, of, with, likes, to, near, sees, by* Other words: (no other words)	CVC word: *can* High-frequency words (not CVC): *good, morning, it's, time, to, have, breakfast, what, does, want, eat, he* Other words: *Nicholas, oatmeal, waffles, bacon, scrambled, eggs*

FIGURE 1.1. Examples of decodable text and predictable text.

words other than those with a CVC pattern, and additional words that do not fit into either of these first two categories. Even the decodable text employs some words that do not have a CVC pattern (e.g., *see*, *the*) because it is virtually impossible to write English sentences without some of these words. However, most words in the decodable text are CVC (or VC), providing children with practice in the decoding skills they are learning. Also, the decodable text has pictures, but these are not selected to enable guessing at words instead of decoding.

In contrast, the predictable text has very few CVC words and includes many words that beginners would not be able to decode, such as *breakfast*, *oatmeal*, *scrambled*, and *bacon*. The repetition of the phrase "He can eat" might help children learn these high-frequency words, but it would not provide practice in applying decoding skills, especially for children whose decoding skills are weak. The pictures encourage guessing instead of close attention to letter sequences in words, which may convey a misleading message to poor decoders about what to attend to when reading, and which may make poor readers appear to be decoding successfully when they actually are not doing so.

SL and Non-SL Activities for Word Reading and Spelling

Figure 1.2 provides an example of a grapheme–phoneme mapping activity that is often employed in SL interventions, either through the type of written grid shown in the figure, or through the use of letter tiles or cards with grapheme–phoneme-level correspondences, not just the 26 letters of the alphabet. For instance, the phoneme /sh/ is represented with a single tile or within a single box, not with separate tiles or boxes for *s* and *h*.

The activity involves giving children a chain of words in which single-phoneme changes are made in unpredictable places in the word, not only the first letter of a word. If the activity is used for decoding, the teacher writes or forms the words with letter tiles, one word at a time; if it is intended for spelling, the teacher dictates the words in sequence and the children write them or use tiles to spell them. Words are carefully chosen to fit the patterns children have been taught. The words shown in Figure 1.2 would be appropriate for children who have learned to decode CVC words, as well as short vowel words with consonant blends and digraphs. The teacher avoids words that

s	i	p		
s	a	p		
s	n	a	p	
s	l	a	p	
f	l	a	p	
f	l	a	sh	
f	l	u	sh	

FIGURE 1.2. Sample grapheme–phoneme mapping activity.

are irregular (e.g., *was*) or that have patterns children have not yet learned. For example, *sip* to *sir* would not be appropriate because *sir* involves a vowel-*r* pattern and does not have a short vowel.

This activity, if implemented well, helps children learn to attend closely to the internal details of words (McCandliss, Beck, Sandak, & Perfetti, 2003) and can be done in a brisk, game-like fashion, which many children find engaging. Many more words than the examples shown in Figure 1.2 could potentially be part of a 10- to 15-minute activity—*flush* to *slush*, *slush* to *slug*, *slug* to *slog*, and so on—providing children with ample practice decoding unfamiliar words in an enjoyable way.

Contrast the SL activity in Figure 1.2 with the sample non-SL activity in Figure 1.3. This activity is a word configuration activity that involves looking at word shapes. It is sometimes used for spelling as well as reading. In this activity, children write the words shown at the top of the figure in the appropriate set of boxes. For instance, the word *saw* is supposed to be written in the set of boxes on the lower left of the figure, because *saw* has three letters, none of which are tall letters, like *t* or *f*. The word *for*, which has one tall letter followed by two shorter ones, is supposed to be written in the set of boxes shown in the upper left of the figure. Words used in this type of activity are often high-frequency words.

Word configuration activities do not draw children's attention to letter patterns in words; rather, they draw attention to the outer shape of words, which is essentially useless for reading or spelling words in English (e.g., *for* has the same outer shape as *too*, *tea*, *fan*, *box*, *ham*, *den*, and myriad other words). Besides failing to develop children's phonics skills, these activities may inadvertently lead children to focus on the wrong property of words—their shape—instead of the property that is most important: the sequence of letters within the word.

Examples of Feedback in SL and Non-SL Approaches

The clear, targeted feedback that students receive in SL approaches contrasts with the type of feedback frequently given in non-SL approaches. Figure 1.4 provides a few examples of this kind of feedback in several domains of literacy: spelling, oral reading of text, and written expression.
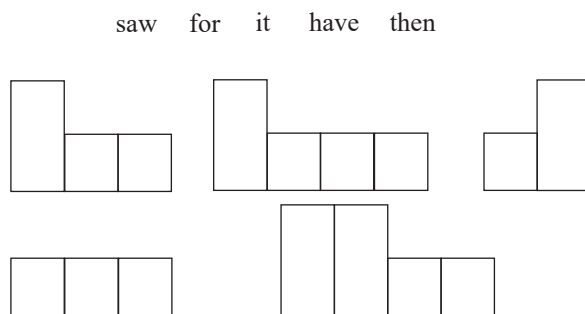
FIGURE 1.3. Sample word configuration activity.

Component area/child's error	Example of SL teacher's feedback	Examples of non-SL feedback
Spelling/A child misspells the word *making* as *makeing*	"What's the base word? Right, *make*; remember the rule for adding -*ing* to this kind of word. What do you need to do? Yes, take out the *e*. So, how do you spell *making*?"	"Take out the *e* in the word"; or teacher provides excessively wordy feedback (e.g., "What is the base word of *making*? Right, *make*. What's the syllable type of *make*? Yes, *make* is a magic *e* word because it has a vowel–consonant–*e* pattern with a long vowel and a silent *e*. Tell me the rule for adding -*ing* to a magic *e* base word. What do you have to do when you add -*ing* to these words?").
Oral reading of text/In the sentence *Mark likes to torture his little sister with his bad singing,* a child reads *torture* as *torment* and then just keeps reading, with no attempt to self-correct	Teacher immediately points to the -*ture* in the printed word *torture*; if child does not self-correct, teacher says, while pointing to -*ture,* "this says /cher/"; when the child decodes *torture* correctly, the teacher says, "Well done! Now just reread that sentence."	"Torture." (Teacher simply tells the child the word, without pointing to it or having the child reread); or teacher ignores the error because it fits the context and does not greatly alter the meaning.
Written expression, sentence structure/In a piece of descriptive writing, a child has many short, repetitive sentences, such as *The puppy is brown. It is little. It has floppy ears. It has huge paws. It likes to bark. Its name is Lucky.*	"The writing would sound better if you combined some of these short sentences. Remember our sentence combining. How can you combine the first three sentences? Excellent. *The little brown puppy has floppy ears.* Now try to do the same thing with some of your other sentences."	"Revise for sentence structure"; or "Try to revise so that there aren't so many short sentences."

FIGURE 1.4. Examples of feedback in SL and non-SL approaches.

As Figure 1.4 shows, in SL approaches, the feedback is not only clear and specific but also facilitates the student's ability to transfer a skill to other tasks in the future. For the child's misspelling of *making,* the teacher reminds the child of a relevant spelling rule that has been taught; for the child who writes short, choppy sentences, the teacher reminds the child of the utility of sentence combining. This kind of feedback is more useful than simply telling the child the correct spelling of a word or noting problems with sentence structure in a piece of writing. It is much more useful than no feedback at all, as in the example of a teacher ignoring a child's decoding error in reading *torment* for *torture.* In each case, the SL feedback ends with the child giving the correct response and experiencing success.

It is important to avoid excessive wordiness in giving feedback, which may be unintentionally confusing. In the second example of non-SL feedback for the misspelling of *making,* the teacher steps the child through a lengthy sequence of identifying the

syllable type of the base word and reciting a rule for adding the ending. This lengthy sequence could be appropriate in a few specific situations (e.g., a child is making the same type of error repeatedly). In general, however, it is best to avoid unduly long-winded feedback because it may fail to keep the child's attention, be difficult for a child with language weaknesses to process, or may distract the child from looking carefully at the pattern in the printed word. Helpful feedback may vary further depending on the specific task, type of response, and other variables (see Archer & Hughes, 2011, for a thorough discussion of the type of feedback typical of SL approaches).

Figure 1.5 summarizes some key practices used in SL approaches with those common in three cueing systems approaches to assessing and teaching reading.

COMMON POOR-READER PROFILES

Poor-reader profiles relate to the simple view of reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990) discussed in a previous section of this chapter. Poor readers can have difficulties with word recognition, coupled with average or better oral language comprehension; or the opposite profile, average word recognition coupled with weaknesses in language comprehension; or they can have weaknesses in both word recognition and language comprehension. Table 1.2 displays three common poor-reader profiles that have been documented in numerous studies and literature reviews (e.g., Capin, Cho, Miciak, Roberts,

Practice	Three cueing systems	Structured literacy
Phonics instruction	Phonics is taught but not explicitly or systematically, and often with a larger-unit approach (e.g., word families)	Explicit, systematic phonics teaching, with initial grapheme–phoneme approach
Assessment of oral text reading	Contextually appropriate errors (e.g., *a* for *the*, *mom* for *mother*) may not be counted	Nearly all word-reading errors are counted, with a few exceptions (e.g., self-corrections, mispronunciations due to articulation or foreign accent)
Texts used in initial reading instruction	Predictable texts that encourage use of pictures and sentence context to aid in reading words	Decodable texts that give practice in applying learned phonics skills and that do not facilitate guessing
Teacher feedback to oral reading errors	Contextually appropriate errors may be ignored; feedback may encourage guessing from context cues rather than close attention to letter sequences in words	Errors not ignored; feedback encourages attention to letter sequences and application of decoding skills *first*, then checking to ensure the word makes sense
Early identification of reading problems	Key abilities, such as phonemic awareness and decoding, may not be appropriately assessed; overreliance on context to compensate for poor decoding often not recognized as a sign of reading difficulties	Key abilities, such as phonemic awareness and decoding, are well assessed; overreliance on context to read words is recognized as common in poor decoders and a sign of risk

FIGURE 1.5. Some practices in three cueing systems and SL approaches.

& Vaughn, 2021; Catts, Adolf, & Weismer, 2006; Catts, Compton, Tomblin, & Bridges, 2012; Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla, 2003; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; Norbury & Nation, 2011; Spear-Swerling, 2004, 2015). For all profiles, children's difficulties may range from mild to severe.

The profile shown in the first row of Table 1.2 involves SWRD, so termed because these poor-readers' difficulties are specific to word recognition and do not involve language comprehension. Weaknesses in word recognition are usually phonological in nature, relating to phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding of unfamiliar words. Because these skills underlie spelling as well as word reading, weaknesses in spelling are also typical of SWRD. These students have at least average oral language comprehension and vocabulary knowledge, and they generally perform well on oral comprehension tasks, such as oral questions during teacher read-alouds of grade-appropriate

TABLE 1.2. Common Poor-Reader Profiles

Profile	Description	Potential focus of SL interventions
Specific word recognition difficulties (SWRD)	• Word recognition skills below average, usually due to poor phonemic awareness and/or poor phonics skills • Broad oral language comprehension and vocabulary at least average • Reading comprehension at least average in texts child can decode well • Poor reading comprehension and poor fluency based entirely in word reading	• Phonemic awareness • Phonics • Automaticity of word reading • Spelling/written expression • Text fluency (word accuracy/automaticity focus)
Specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD)	• Word recognition skills, including phonics and phonemic awareness, at least average • Reading comprehension below average despite good word reading, often due to a specific weakness in oral language area(s), such as vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge, inferencing, or pragmatics • Any fluency weaknesses based entirely in language comprehension, not word reading	• Individual students' specific weaknesses in language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, inferencing) • Text fluency (prosody/language comprehension focus) • Reading comprehension • Written expression
Mixed reading difficulties (MRD)	• Word recognition skills below average, usually due to poor phonemic awareness and/or poor phonics skills • Reading comprehension also weak, beyond what can be accounted for by poor word reading (e.g., students have poor reading comprehension even in some texts they can decode well) • Specific oral language weaknesses (e.g., vocabulary, syntax) contribute to reading comprehension problems that are due to a combination of word recognition and language comprehension weaknesses • Reading fluency often poor due to a combination of word recognition and language comprehension weaknesses	• Phonemic awareness • Phonics • Automaticity of word reading • Spelling • Text fluency • Individual students' specific weaknesses in language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, inferencing) • Reading comprehension • Written expression

books. When children with SWRD read texts that they can decode well, their reading comprehension is good. Problems with reading fluency and reading comprehension in students with SWRD relate entirely to problems with accuracy or automaticity of word recognition.

Specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD), shown in the second row of Table 1.2, involve the opposite pattern. Children with SRCD have average or better word recognition skills, including at least average phonological skills. Despite their good word reading, however, they have problems in reading comprehension. Their difficulties in reading comprehension usually involve weaknesses in one or more areas of oral language comprehension (Catts et al., 2006; Nation, 2005), such as vocabulary, background knowledge, syntax, discourse structure, inferencing, or pragmatic language; other specific cognitive weaknesses, such as in executive function or working memory, may also negatively impact their reading comprehension (Cutting, Materek, Cole, Levine, & Mahone, 2009; Fletcher et al., 2019; Wagner, Beal, Zirps, & Spencer, 2021). The language weaknesses of students with SRCD are often relatively mild, with students' weaknesses not severe enough to make them eligible for speech/language services (Nation, 2005). However, as these students advance in school and the texts they are expected to read become more demanding in terms of comprehension, even mild weaknesses in language comprehension may begin to impact reading comprehension (Scarborough, 2005).

Students with SRCD tend to display some similar difficulties in both listening and reading. If a student with SRCD has limitations in vocabulary knowledge, those problems tend to manifest whether they are listening to a teacher read a story or reading it themselves. In addition, these difficulties often affect written expression, as well as reading comprehension. For example, weak vocabulary knowledge may impact word choice and elaboration in a student's writing. When students with SRCD have poor reading fluency, those difficulties are not based in word recognition difficulties; rather, children with SRCD might read slowly because of difficulty understanding what they are reading.

The third profile of poor reading involves MRD, in which students have below-average word recognition, as well as reading comprehension problems that exceed what can be explained by poor word recognition alone. A student with MRD who has weaknesses in vocabulary might display poor reading comprehension even when reading text that he or she can decode well, because of the added influence of not knowing the meanings of words. In students with MRD, poor reading comprehension and poor reading fluency reflect a combination of weaknesses in word recognition and language comprehension. As is true for some poor readers with SRCD, poor reading in some students with MRD may also be influenced by specific cognitive weaknesses in areas such as executive function and working memory (Cutting et al., 2009; Fletcher et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2021).

An important point about poor-reader profiles is that, by themselves, they do not provide information about underlying causality. Poor readers might have a profile of SWRD because they have an intrinsic disability, such as dyslexia, or because of inadequate classroom reading instruction with no explicit teaching of phonemic awareness or phonics. Poor readers with a profile of SRCD might have an intrinsic disability, such

as a language disorder or high-functioning autism (Norbury & Nation, 2011), or their reading difficulties might relate entirely to limited exposure to English. Nonetheless, the profile is very useful as a starting point for planning interventions. A child with SWRD who reads slowly due to poor word recognition might benefit from fluency interventions aimed at accuracy and automaticity of word reading, but these fluency interventions are not likely to help a student with SRCD, whose reading difficulties are not based in word reading.

The prevalence of different poor-reader profiles has varied across research studies, depending on variables such as the age and demographic background of the participants, the specific measures used to determine the profile, specific criteria for defining groups, and other aspects of study methodology. In a mostly middle-class sample, Leach and colleagues (2003) found that SWRD and MRD were far more common in children identified as poor readers in the primary grades than SRCD—however, among children identified as poor readers in grades 4 and 5, about one-third of poor readers displayed SRCD. Catts and colleagues (2012) also found late-emerging poor readers, typically defined as poor reading first manifesting after grade 3, to be heterogeneous in profile, with 36% having a profile of SWRD, 52% SRCD, and 12% MRD.

In contrast to Leach and colleagues (2003) and Catts and colleagues (2012), Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) studied sixth-grade poor readers and found virtually none with SWRD. However, their sample included many English learners and children from low-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and vocabulary weaknesses were widespread in their sample, so children with word-reading difficulties, about 21% of the sample, displayed MRD, not SWRD. In a more recent study involving fourth graders with severe reading comprehension difficulties, as well as a substantial proportion of English learners, Capin and colleagues (2021) found that virtually all of the poor readers had a profile of MRD, although there was some variability across children in relative weakness of word recognition versus language comprehension.

Overall, research on poor-reader profiles supports the idea that significant problems in word reading persist in many older poor readers, as well as the value of multi-component interventions, a topic addressed in the final chapter of this volume. Because individual children may manifest any of the three profiles, appropriate assessment of component reading and language skills is essential.

The far right-hand column of Table 1.2 summarizes the potential focus of SL interventions for students with different profiles of poor reading. Not every area listed is necessarily relevant for a given student. For instance, an older child with SWRD might still need work on automaticity of word recognition, spelling, and text-reading fluency, but not on phonemic awareness or basic phonics skills. Also, children with different profiles might need a different focus in text-fluency interventions. Those with SRCD are unlikely to benefit from a fluency intervention that targets word reading but might benefit from one targeting prosody of text reading, such as the phrase cueing intervention described in detail in Chapter 5 (Hudson, Anderson, McGraw, Ray, & Wilhelm, this volume), especially if it is combined with intervention addressing their underlying comprehension weaknesses.

For children with SRCD and MRD, whose reading difficulties include comprehension, it is important to try to determine individual students' specific weakness(es)

within that domain, such as vocabulary, syntax, inferencing, and so on. It should also be remembered that individual poor-readers' specific language weaknesses will manifest in their written expression, as well as their reading comprehension. If a poor reader has difficulties with syntax, for example, those difficulties will tend to affect his or her ability to write correct sentences, as well as read them.

Information in Table 1.2 may help readers of this volume determine which chapters are especially appropriate for a particular student or group of students with whom they are intervening.

SUMMARY

The content of Structured Literacy involves key language and literacy-related skills needed for learning to read and write, including phonemic awareness, phonics, orthographic knowledge, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Central features of SL interventions include highly explicit, systematic teaching of important skills and concepts, with attention to prerequisite skills; the provision of prompt, clear, targeted feedback; planned, purposeful selections of instructional examples, tasks, and texts; the use of a synthetic-phonics approach at the grapheme–phoneme level in initial phonics and spelling intervention; teaching for transfer; and data-based decision making. SL interventions can be effective with children who have a range of reading problems involving comprehension, as well as foundational skills: those with SWRD, SRCD, and MRD.

APPLICATION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

An interventionist working with a group of second-grade poor decoders is introducing the magic *e* (ME) rule: the generalization that in a word with a *vce* pattern, the first vowel will be long and the *e* will be silent. The children know all long vowel sounds and have already learned to decode a wide variety of one-syllable, short vowel words. Which of the following sets of words would be best for the interventionist to use as examples of ME words? Explain your answer in relation to each set of words.

Set A: *ape, chime, blade, some, lose, stripe*
Set B: *tape, poke, prince, cube, hope, dance*
Set C: *rope, bride, use, shake, cone, ate*
Set D: *cake, wide, rode, cube, tame, save*

ANSWER

Set A is not a good example set because it has two phonetically irregular words in it: *some* and *lose*. Set D is restricted to four-letter words, which may cause children to incorrectly infer that ME words always have four letters. Set B contains the words

prince and *dance*, which (though they end in a silent *e*) do not conform to the *vce* pattern and do not have a long vowel. The best choice is Set C, which provides varied and appropriate examples of ME words, including ME words that do not start with any consonants (e.g., *use*, *ate*).

Activity 2

Lola is a sixth-grade poor reader with a profile of SWRD, who has struggled with decoding since first grade. She has had several years of highly structured phonics interventions, and she can now accurately decode all one-syllable word patterns, as well as a wide range of two-syllable patterns, such as words with common suffixes (e.g., *needing*, *likely*), words with consonant-*le* (e.g., *candle*, *staple*), and words with a *vccv* pattern (e.g., *rabbit*, *lantern*). She has some ability to decode multisyllabic words but still needs work in this area. Her primary intervention needs to involve further work on decoding of multisyllabic words, spelling, and text-reading fluency. Does Lola need to read decodable text in her intervention?

ANSWER

Lola should not need decodable text in the sense of text that is phonetically controlled to specific word patterns, because at this point she can consistently decode a variety of one-syllable and two-syllable words, and even some multisyllabic words. These skills should enable her to function well in uncontrolled texts, such as curriculum materials and trade books. However, it is important that texts used in her intervention be ones that she can read with a high degree of accuracy, so that she can build fluency and understand what she is reading. Therefore, texts for intervention should be at Lola's instructional level, which may be below her grade placement (grade 6).

Activity 3

Lewis is a fifth grader who was thought to be doing well in reading during his first few years of school. He consistently met both accuracy and rate benchmarks for oral reading fluency on the screening and progress monitoring assessments that his school used in grades K–3. He also had good spelling and writing skills. However, last year, in the middle of fourth grade, Lewis's teacher and parents became concerned about his reading, and he has been referred for intervention. The main concerns about Lewis involve his comprehension of the texts used in grade 5, especially his ability to answer inferencing types of questions and to grasp the key points of a text. Lewis's teacher notices these problems in oral class discussions, as well as when Lewis is reading. Lewis is also having some difficulties in written expression. His foundational writing skills are strong, including his spelling and handwriting, but he has great difficulty elaborating answers; he will often produce only a sentence or two of writing, when a much longer response is expected. In addition, his writing shows numerous weaknesses in sentence structure and organization. Based on this

description, does Lewis's profile of reading difficulties sound like SWRD, SRCD, or MRD? Justify your answer.

ANSWER

Lewis's profile appears to be that of a student with SRCD. If he consistently met accuracy and rate benchmarks for oral reading fluency in the early grades, and if his spelling is strong, this makes SWRD or MRD unlikely, because there does not appear to be a phonological or word recognition component to his literacy difficulties. Like-wise, his written expression problems appear to be connected to broad language skills, not phonology. It would be important to probe the nature of Lewis's comprehension and writing weaknesses further in assessment, to clarify these issues and to help plan intervention.

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