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New Definition of Reading

by Dr. Lillian Boyd

*Reading is the process of **constructing meaning** through the **dynamic interaction** among the reader's **existing knowledge**, the **information suggested** by the written language, and the **context** of the reading situation.*

For persons, who in the past, saw reading as a process of transforming visual representation (symbols) of language into meaning, the redefinition may, on first encounter, appear very complex. However, upon examining the redefinition in detail, it becomes clear that the new view of the reading process is far more descriptive of the act of reading.

Examining key words from the redefinition is helpful in analyzing its meaning. For example, **constructing meaning** indicates the meaning is not simply extracted from the text but is actively created in the mind of the reader. The term **dynamic interaction** denotes a non-static, variable, adaptive process of communication that is dependent not only upon the knowledge and skill of the author but on the knowledge and skill of the reader as well.

Existing knowledge, also known as prior knowledge or schema, is of paramount importance to the act of constructing meaning. Research has found that prior

knowledge may be the **most** important determinant of reading comprehension. The information suggested by the written language is indeed only **suggested** by the author. The reader's prior knowledge greatly determines how the information will be interpreted. The **context** of the reading situation also influences interpretation. **When, how, and where** information or text is presented often determines how it is received by the reader. "No two persons ever read the same book" as a statement is an excellent example of how each of the key elements in the redefinition greatly influences individual's interpretations of text and why we often glean different concepts from the same text.

To further examine the assumptions which form the basis of the redefinition, read the position paper published by **MRA** entitled, **Reading Redefined: A Michigan Reading Association Position Paper**.

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