

## Concepts in Language Arts

In my past work, I only dealt with thematic and writer's craft concepts in language arts, but over the years I developed a nagging feeling that there are some other concepts in this area. My East Coast friend and colleague Dr. Lois Lanning, assistant superintendent in the Pomperaug School District in Connecticut, and I began to have lengthy discussions about concepts in the language arts. Lois has long been an advocate for high literacy standards and has a strong reputation as a language arts consultant. We offer some of our discussions and thinking to this point as a springboard for your own work with language arts concepts.

Lois and I agree that when we are dealing with the specific skills across the strands of language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing), it would be a distraction to worry about big ideas. Big ideas reflect *conceptual understanding*. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing represent *procedural knowledge*, for the most part.

I questioned Lois to probe the extension of her thinking:

*Lois:* Within the strands of language arts, there are essential strategies that subsume numerous supporting skills. Knowing how to execute these strategies and skills (procedural knowledge) efficiently and effectively is critical to the development of literacy competence.

*Lynn:* So how does a learner develop a deep knowledge and conceptual understanding of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing?

*Lois:* I suggest it is through ongoing, meaningful practice, applying essential language arts strategies and skills to an abundant variety of texts and through the study of the concepts in text. As a learner discovers the rich synergy between the strategic processing of text and the understanding of text concepts, he or she achieves a deep and long-lasting understanding of the text.

[Figure 2.7 illustrates this relationship.]

*Lynn:* What do you mean by *text*, and is it important to develop a deep understanding of the concepts in text through the grade levels?

*Lois:* Text is the primary vehicle used to study the language arts. I refer to the term *text* as any medium of communication (e.g., electronic/written text, film, digital, oral, etc.). A rich reservoir of specific concepts is concentrated within text. Different types of text provide many examples for considering transferable concepts. [See Chart 2.3.] To be an expert in language arts, one must fully understand the various macro- and microconcepts found in text. The complex concepts in text are worth teaching directly and through the grade levels because literacy is a long-term developmental process. It takes years to unpack the sophisticated relationships of text concepts.

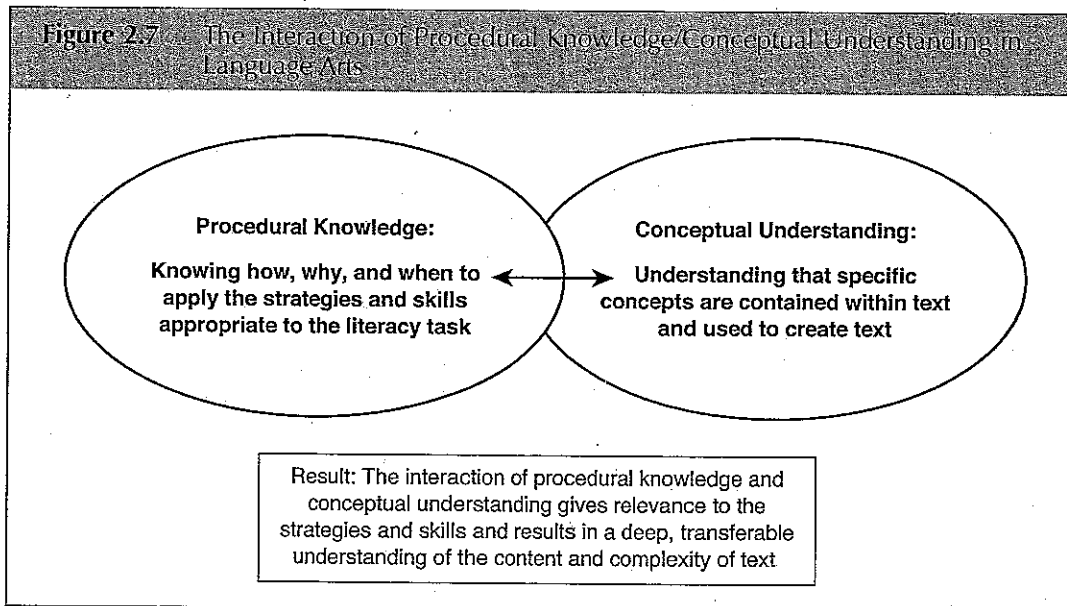
*Lynn:* Can you give me an example?

*Lois:* Here is a reading example: Reading strategies and skills allow initial access to text and enable the reader to make sense of what is being read. A reader

is able to go further and be much more critical and reflective about the story if the concept of *character* is understood. A conceptual understanding of character allows the reader to evaluate the character as presented by the author. . . . Deep comprehension involves the personalization or transformation of text at the conceptual level. In other words, readers form their idea of character by filtering the concept through their prior knowledge bank—and then use that personalized conceptual lens to better evaluate and gain a deeper understanding of the character presented by the author. Conceptual depth builds as text is considered from multiple perspectives: the perspective of the reader, viewer, or listener, as well as the perspective of the writer.

Figure 2.7 illustrates Dr. Lanning's ideas related to the synergy between procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding.

Katie Wood Ray (1999), the author of *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom*, explains the rationale of teaching text concepts



SOURCE: Dr. Lois Lanning, Avon, CT. Used with permission.

when she says that thoughtful readers not only delve into text as readers, but also read text as writers. This is why the concepts of text, such as writer's craft, are important to all the strands of language arts. A deep understanding and appreciation of the complexities of language arts are achieved as procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding of text develop over time.

In Chart 2.3, Dr. Lanning looks at the macro- and microconcepts in text (fiction and nonfiction), which suggest important conceptual understandings.

**Chart 2.3** Concepts in Text

<i>Types of Text</i>	<i>Sample Macroconcepts</i>	<i>Sample Microconcepts</i>
<b>FICTION</b>	<p><b>ELEMENTS</b></p> <p><b>STRUCTURE/Form</b></p> <p><b>GENRE</b></p> <p><b>THEME</b></p> <p><b>WRITER'S CRAFT</b></p>	<p><b>Character:</b> Protagonist, Antagonist, Dynamic/Static, Hero/Tragic Hero, Foil</p> <p><b>Plot:</b> Causality, Foreshadowing, Suspense, Conflict, Motivation</p> <p><b>Setting:</b> Historical, Future, Cultural Context, Environment</p> <p>Cumulative, Interlocking, Circle Story, Classical, Minimalist, Surreal</p> <p>Mysteries, Folk Tales, Historical Fiction, Short Stories, Poetry, Science Fiction, Comedy, Tragedy, Plays</p> <p>Prejudice and Perspective, Heroes, Loneliness, Fairness</p> <p><b>Ideas:</b> Purpose, Originality, Topics</p> <p><b>Organization:</b> Structure, Leads, Transitions, Details, Order, Conclusions, Pattern</p> <p><b>Voice:</b> Tone, Audience, Emotion</p> <p><b>Word Choice:</b> Figurative and Sensory Language, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia, Symbolism</p> <p><b>Sentence Fluency:</b> Rhythm, Cadence, Flow</p> <p><b>Conventions:</b> Mechanics, Punctuation, Presentation, Grammar, Format, Epigrams, Epithets</p>

<i>Types of Text</i>	<i>Sample Macroconcepts</i>	<i>Sample Microconcepts</i>
<b>NONFICTION</b>	<b>ELEMENTS</b>	<b>Subject/Character, Issue or Exigency (event demanding a response):</b> Main Idea, Supporting Details, Events  <b>Audience:</b> Targeted, General Public  <b>Purpose:</b> Exposure, Explanation, Definition, Persuasion, Analysis/Synthesis, Argument, Propaganda, Description, Motivation
	<b>STRUCTURE/Form</b>	Cause/Effect, Problem/Solution, Exposition, Temporal, Compare/Contrast
	<b>GENRE</b>	Biography/Autobiography, Technical, Essay, Satire, Historical, Persuasive, Poetry
	<b>THEME</b>	Social Reform, Conflict/Cooperation, Courage, Power/Influence
	<b>WRITER'S CRAFT</b> (see macroconcepts under Writer's Craft in the Fiction section of this chart)	(See microconcepts under Writer's Craft in the Fiction section of this chart)

SOURCE: Dr. Lois Lanning, Avon, CT. Used with permission.