

readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning with text.<sup>1</sup> Each of these types of knowledge impacts the sense that readers construct through print. Readers easily comprehend text with familiar language but are less successful at comprehending text

with unfamiliar language.<sup>2</sup> Readers easily comprehend text on familiar topics but are less successful at comprehending texts on unfamiliar topics.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the interpretations readers construct with texts as well as the types of texts they read are influenced by their life experiences.<sup>4</sup>

The sociocultural, cognitive, and linguistic systems readers use to make sense of print are largely intuitive. For example, few are aware that they use their life experiences to interpret text, and that as life experiences differ from reader to reader and from community to community so, too, do interpretations of a given text. Similarly, few are aware that when they are reading about statistics they understand the phrase *all the figures on the right hand side of the table* means numerals in rows and columns, but when they are reading about crafts they understand the same phrase means figurines on a piece of furniture;<sup>5</sup> nevertheless, they do.

The systems readers use to make sense of print are interrelated and partially redundant. For instance, in the sentence *There are some books on the table*, the words *some* and *are* and the letter *s* in *books* signal that there is more than one book. This redundancy permits readers to sample print, using only what they need to construct meaning effectively and efficiently.<sup>6</sup> Readers also use these interrelated systems to make predictions concerning what the print says, to confirm or disconfirm their predictions, and to connect these meanings to form a coherent understanding of the text.

Readers read for different purposes. Sometimes they read for pleasure. Sometimes they read for information. Their reason for reading impacts the way they read. They may skim or read carefully depending on why they are reading. Throughout this process, readers monitor the meaning they are constructing. When the text does not meet their purposes they may switch to another text. Readers expect what they are reading to make sense. They use a repertoire of strategies, such as rethinking, re-reading or reading on to clarify ideas, to make sure they understand what they read in order to accomplish their purposes.

Writers also contribute to how well readers are able to read a text. The writer's language and knowledge of the topic as well as skill in using written language influence the reader's ability to construct meaning. The degree to which readers and writers share the same understanding of the language and the topic of the text influences how well they communicate with each other.

## Learning to Read

Learning to read is a life-long process. People begin developing knowledge that they will use to read during their earliest interactions with families and communities. In their pre-school years, children learn to understand and use spoken language and learn about their world through meaningful interactions with others.

Children also learn about written language as more experienced readers provide meaningful demonstrations of reading and writing.<sup>7</sup> Some of the earliest demonstrations they receive include reading environmental print (such as the word *stop* on a stop sign), making and using grocery lists, writing and reading notes, and reading and discussing children's stories and letters from friends.