

# Foreword

by P. David Pearson

It is always a privilege—and quite easy—to recommend a useful book. On those grounds alone, I was pleased to be asked to write a foreword for such a profoundly useful book. Teachers, administrators, and teacher educators will find lots of good ideas for making QARs happen in their classrooms, schools, and internship programs.

It is doubly a privilege when the book is not only useful but also based on solid theory and research. Born of the revolution in our understanding of reading in the late 1970s, Question Answer Relationships (QARs, or *kwars* as some kids call them) are a direct outcome of the time Taffy and I, along with Kathy Au and a host of others, spent immersed in the new ideas of schema theory (Anderson, Spiro, & Montague, 1977) and script theory (Schank & Abelson, 1977), thinking about how they related to comprehension instruction (Durkin, 1978; Pearson & Johnson, 1978). As Taffy and her colleagues discuss in the introduction, it was in this milieu that Taffy had the idea of finding a way to make explicit to kids a process that usually only scholars described. This was a breakthrough for Taffy, and it led ultimately to a breakthrough for thousands of teachers around the country. What teachers liked about QAR was the language—having words that enabled them to label, discuss, dissect, and analyze these slippery ideas with their students. But the point is that both the theory (the fundamental idea that reading involves a reader making connections between his or her own knowledge, the ideas in a text, and the author who wrote the text) and the research documenting the efficacy of QARs have widened, deepened, and withstood the test of time.

The privilege is compounded even more when one has a close professional and personal relationship with the authors. I had the good fortune of meeting the three authors when each was a doctoral student in reading and language. I have followed the work that the three of them have done separately and in pairs, and I admire it all. The work that Kathy Au did with the Kamehameha Early Education Project (KEEP) still serves as a model of what culturally responsive (and responsible) pedagogy is all about. Taffy's work on Book Club, of course, is seminal. Kathy Highfield joined Taffy in an offshoot of Book Club, called Book Club Plus, with the explicit goal of bringing the key elements of Book Club into an age of standards and consequential assessments. And Kathy Au and Taffy have each been involved in implementing a version of standards-based reform (Taffy in Chicago and Kathy in Hawaii) that brings together many of these common threads. What is special about *QAR Now* is that here these threads from the authors' individual and collective earlier work are woven into the QAR curriculum they have built for us as readers and teachers. (In fact, it might be more accurate to say that QAR is woven into the earlier work.) So we read about how QARs can be adapted to standards, correlated with state outcomes, or used to prepare kids to take state tests. We see that they can be embedded easily into a Book Club curriculum by sharpening students' ability to ask different sorts of questions at different points in the reading of a chapter book. We also see that QAR instruction can be enhanced when it is conceptualized within a sociocultural view of learning (the Vygotsky Space in Chapter 2). As I said, I am not sure that QAR is woven into these earlier threads or vice-versa. But in either case, the weaving works to produce a sturdy and attractive "whole cloth."

Finally, the privilege is raised to an even higher level (I think we're at the 4th power!) when the topic is so important, the information so relevant, and the stakes for ignoring the message so high. We live and work during a curricular age in which, once again, we are reaching back to the "basics" to make sure that kids know their ABCs (now augmented by phonemic awareness), have acquired their phonics skills, and can read fluently. That is all well and good (I have nothing against knowing the code or reading fluently), but those basics won't take us far enough. They won't get individual students or our nation to the

“proficient” level on NAEP that these authors discuss in their introduction. To meet that challenge, to prepare for the life of reason, critical analysis, and good citizenship that we hold as aspirations for all of our children, we’ll have to stretch a little, maybe a lot, further. Instead of thinking about comprehension as a magic box where “a miracle occurs,” we’ll have to think about it as a complex process that can be unpacked, unmasked, and brought out for public inspection—so that all students, and especially those who really do think it is a miracle, can see how it works. That’s the key to this book—its authors are helping teachers, and ultimately their students, learn how to unpack the black box of comprehension so that they can all see, up close and personal, how it works. What’s even better is that when the three of them take us on this journey to the center of the mind, they are wonderful tour guides.

So enjoy the adventure! And when you finish, you too will be qualified to lead that very same journey. And may your students enjoy the intellectual adventure for which you will serve as their tour guide.

# Introduction

In the late 1970s, disquieting information about classroom literacy instruction was being uncovered, while at the same time remarkable understandings about how we learn from text were being discovered. Dolores Durkin’s now classic study had just appeared in *Reading Research Quarterly* (Durkin, 1978–79), documenting how rarely comprehension instruction occurred in the classroom. At the same time, concepts we take for granted today, including schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) and metacognition (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981), were being introduced and applied to comprehension instruction in books such as *Teaching Reading Comprehension* by P. David Pearson and Dale Johnson (1978). Despite this growing body of research on comprehension, there was much to learn about comprehension-strategy instruction.

It was in this climate that Question Answer Relationships—QAR—was born from a research project involving second- through eighth-grade students. Taffy Raphael—the creator of QAR—was a graduate student working as a research assistant to David Pearson. Pearson was one of the scholars deeply involved in linking the theoretical work of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to the world of classroom instruction. Pearson served as a mentor and adviser to many graduate students at that time, guiding them to focus on different aspects of comprehension instruction, such as developing strategies, understanding comprehension assessment, and identifying effective teaching practices. Taffy had become particularly interested in the

questioning practices that seemed to be the basis of so much of the research and strategy work. Almost everyone doing comprehension research used questions to evaluate what students had learned. We all took for granted that being able to answer questions was a clear and valid indication that students had understood the text.

But Taffy saw student responses to questions that concerned her. She noticed students who appeared to ignore completely the texts they had just read as they struggled to answer questions. They never looked back at the source that could have helped them answer a question easily. Others spent inordinate amounts of time rereading, when questions could have been answered easily from their prior experiences. Taffy was also concerned about the questions students were asked. Questions were usually categorized as literal or inferential, based on the words in the question alone—often with reference to Bloom’s taxonomy. For example, a question that began with *why* was identified as inferential, even when the answer to the question was clearly stated in the text. Questions beginning with *what* were sometimes labeled as low-level factual questions when, in fact, answering them required students to integrate text extensively and to make inferences.

Perhaps not surprisingly—she was David’s student—Taffy was drawn to a different system of categorizing questions that Pearson and Johnson (1978) had developed. They argued that the difficulty level of a question could be judged only in light of the task demands of the question and the source or sources of information the reader would need to use to answer it. They laid out three categories of questions:

<b>Text Explicit</b>	<b>Text Implicit</b>	<b>Script Implicit</b>
The information necessary to answer the question is located in a single place in the text. The reader would have to search for the information but would not have to engage in inferential thinking.	The information necessary to answer the question is in the text, but the reader would need to engage in inferential thinking or, at the minimum, make intertextual connections.	Answers come from the reader’s schema—the “scripts” we have in our brains that help us recognize familiar situations and use what we know to answer a new question.

These three categories formed the basis for Taffy's original series of research studies (Raphael & McKinney, 1983; Raphael & Pearson, 1985; Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985), in which she explored the essential questions:

- \* In what ways does knowing about the relationship between the question, the text to which the question refers, and the readers' knowledge base help readers more effectively respond to comprehension questions after reading?
- \* How can we teach QAR effectively?

Because the language of the Pearson and Johnson taxonomy was so theoretical, Taffy renamed the categories Right There (Text Explicit), Think & Search (Text Implicit), and On My Own (Script Implicit) and called these categories Question Answer Relationships, or QAR. This categorization system has been refined and instructional applications of it have been extended to a range of purposes for more than two decades. In fact, the staying power of QAR has been quite remarkable. Teachers use it in a variety of ways across grade levels and in a range of subject areas. Its simplicity makes it is accessible to beginning teachers and beginning readers and yet useful to the most experienced teachers and their students of all levels.

Why publish this book now? Our work with QAR for the last 25 years has shown us that QAR can successfully address four important issues (Raphael & Au, 2005).

**1. Teachers and students have difficulty communicating effectively about problems with comprehension and questions.**

QAR addresses this challenge by giving teachers and students a shared language to make visible the largely invisible process underlying reading comprehension. More than anything else, it is this shared language that seems to account for the staying power of QAR. The original work with QAR centered on the use of the question categories in classrooms and the ways that QAR allowed teachers and students to address issues related to questions and reading comprehension. QAR illuminates the relationship between questioning and reading comprehension for