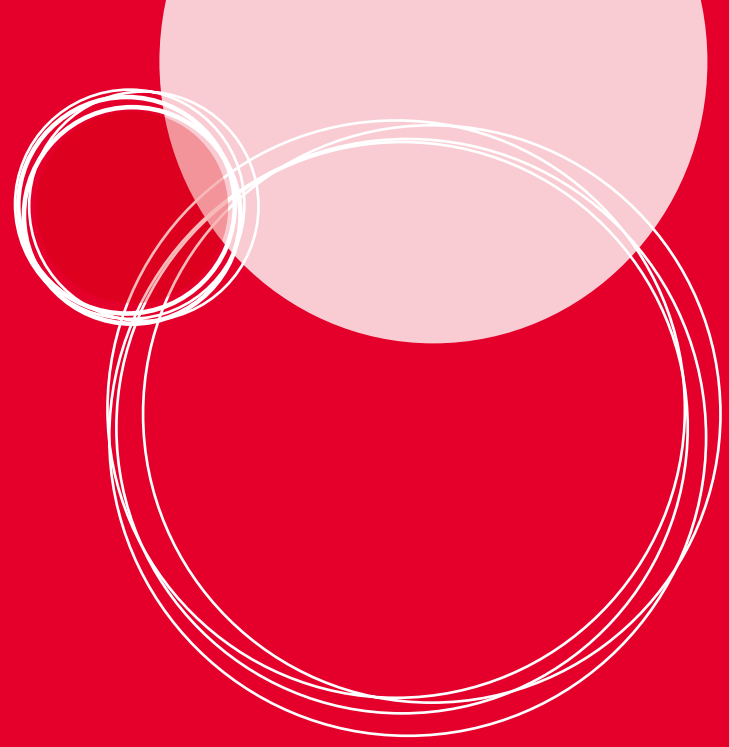


SCHOLASTIC EDUCATION

# Comprehensive Literacy



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## COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY

### A Framework for Joyful and Powerful Teaching and Learning

Comprehensive literacy is based on key principles that are firmly rooted in decades of research about language, learning, teaching, assessment, and curriculum and shaped by extensive classroom testing on multiple continents. At its core, effective comprehensive literacy reflects a profound understanding about the best ways to live and learn with students in classrooms and schools. The first Global Teacher Prize–winner Nancie Atwell’s acclaimed and intellectually invigorating school, The Center for Teaching and Learning in Edgecomb, Maine, is brilliantly alive with classroom libraries, student research, and student-selected reading and writing, and is regarded by many as a pinnacle of comprehensive literacy. *Atwell simply considers it excellent teaching—what you do as a responsible, caring teacher.* This paper will explore how you can replicate her achievements in your classrooms.

### Eight Principles of Comprehensive Literacy

Renowned educator Dorothy Strickland once remarked that how comprehensive literacy educators teach is as important as what they teach. This list of comprehensive literacy principles attempts to capture the how and what as well as the why.

#### 1. The art of teaching is responsive, guided by a continuous teaching, learning, assessing loop.

Comprehensive literacy teachers engage in continuous assessment so they can, at any moment, respond specifically to each student’s challenges and build on each student’s strengths. Teachers watch, listen, and come to understand every student across multiple instructional contexts: one on one, in small groups, and in the whole group—and engage students in self-reflection and assessment. They teach with deep intention and compassion as well as with clear goals; every teaching move they make is informed by their knowledge of research together with their insights about each student drawn from multiple sources of formative and summative assessment.

#### 2. Learning flows through language.

Comprehensive literacy educators embrace the power and joy of language. They understand that learning flows through language, both oral and written; they immerse students in conversation and text, creating thinking classrooms that resound with inquiry across the curriculum. Language—reading, writing, and talking across multimedia—provides the tools of discovery.

Every student has opportunities to talk, present, and lead. Teachers model asking open-ended questions and use dynamic learning language (“Let’s give it a go”) rather than fixed performance terms (“That’s too hard for you”) (Johnston 2013). In this way, teachers help every student develop a “growth mindset” (Dweck 2006).

### 3. Oral language is the foundation of literacy.

Comprehensive literacy educators understand that oral language development precedes literacy and also parallels it; oral and written language are mutually supportive developmental language processes. The quality of the language that children hear at home, including the books they hear read aloud, shapes their language development (Hart and Risley 2003, Cunningham and Zibulsky 2013). Ultimately, learning to read is the “weaving together of multiple skills, understandings, and orientations, many of which have their developmental origins in infancy and toddlerhood” (Snow and Juel 2008).

### 4. Reading and writing are purposeful and meaning-driven.

Students learn to read by reading—and as they increase the volume of their reading with expert teacher support, they build their proficiency as readers. Comprehensive literacy teachers never skip a day of independent reading! Every day, they encourage their students to read self-selected fiction and nonfiction at school and at home, and through interactive read-alouds, shared and guided reading, and facilitated book clubs, they help their students practice reading in a smoothly orchestrated way, building and strengthening their reading power and stamina.

All of this is true for writing as well; students learn to write by writing for wide and varied purposes with the help of an expert teacher. Reading and writing are mutually beneficial; students learn to control both the holistic meaning of written language as well as all the particulars (sounds, letters, words, and the like) while they use written language to learn. Teachers confer with students, celebrating their accomplishments while always monitoring, assessing, and teaching.

### 5. Classrooms and schools are vibrant, vital learning communities.

Classrooms and schools brim with print and student projects. Every student feels at home, supported, encouraged, and loved. Creativity, curiosity, and collaboration are the learning pulse of the classroom—and a robust library is the heart of the classroom. Students enjoy easy access to many (ideally, 1,500-plus) high-quality texts across all genres.

Working together, students learn to ask their own questions across the curriculum and follow a line of inquiry. Effective teachers understand that the impact of reading and writing intensifies when students are driven by real-world questions to search for real answers that they then share with a real audience. Students learn to read with purpose, power, and passion (Duke 2015).

### 6. Students are self-directed learners who thrive with expert, thoughtful instruction.

Comprehensive literacy teachers place students’ well-being and academic success at the center of everything they do. They rely on the gradual release of responsibility model to differentiate instruction (Pearson and Gallagher 1983): First, teachers demonstrate a new understanding and then encourage the whole class to give it a go. Then they invite students to try it on their own or with a partner.

Always, teachers keep their eye on foundational skills, making sure that their students are learning to control, within the context of meaningful reading and writing, sound/letter relationships, word recognition, fluency, phonics, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. If direct instruction is needed, teachers provide it. As literacy researcher Michael Pressley (2003) explained, “the goal of the comprehensive literacy teacher [is] to move students ahead, so that every day there is new learning; every day students are working at the edge of their competencies and growing as readers and writers.”

### 7. Families are their children’s first and most important teachers.

Comprehensive literacy teachers value family and community, honor cultural and linguistic diversity, and support each child’s home language and culture. Teachers recognize that every family’s stories and funds of knowledge (Moll, Soto-Santiago, and Schwartz 2013) represent invaluable learning resources for both the family and the school.

Comprehensive literacy teachers also provide ongoing parent education so parents understand the specifics of what they can do at home to help their children as readers, writers, and learners. The aim is open communication and collaboration with families. Bottom line: parents are valued members of the school community and are always welcome in the classroom.

### 8. Teachers are professional decision-makers.

Comprehensive literacy teachers embrace their own professional learning lives and align their practices with their theoretical knowledge of language and learning. They also engage in continual self-renewal and maintain a robust learning life enriched by onsite, offsite, and online professional learning communities, book study groups, exchanges on social media, and more. Additionally, they fill their classrooms with authentic texts—high-quality YA and children’s literature, newspapers and magazines, a wide range of multimedia, and access to primary sources such as historical correspondence and diaries, scientific documents, and the like.

In sum, comprehensive literacy teachers respect their students as powerful learners and aim to help them explore their own questions, shape their own values, and imagine lives beyond the ones they live—while helping them develop the confidence, understanding, and skills they need for both academic and personal success. In comprehensive literacy classrooms, teachers and students love reading, writing, and learning.

## The Comprehensive Literacy Framework

Effective teachers create strength-based, high-quality literacy instruction that helps all students learn with purpose, proficiency, power, and joy. Every day, comprehensive literacy teachers organize their instruction around a gradual release of responsibility and whole-group, small-group, and independent practice as they work to:

### Strengthen Oral Language Skills

- set the stage for strong reading and writing skills later in life.
- invite children into extended discourse that promotes knowledge beyond the here and now.
- promote basic vocabulary and grammar, which are essential to comprehension.
- value emerging bilinguals' native languages, recognizing that a strong foundation in those languages promotes school achievement in English.

### Build Foundational Language Skills and Conventions

- help children learn the alphabetic principle and develop phonological awareness.
- strengthen students' abilities to apply written conventions such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- expand students' vocabulary and conceptual knowledge.
- foster word study, recognizing that 90 percent of the words in a text are drawn from 4,000 simple word families.

### Share Interactive Read-Alouds

- increase students' attention spans and listening skills, bolster vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, and develop comprehension strategies and story schema.
- enable all students to access and enjoy the rich language of complex texts and refine students' understanding of genre, format, literary elements, and text structures and features.
- develop a literate classroom culture and shared language around books that foster a lifelong love of reading.

### Practice Guided Reading

- place students on an accelerated course to reading with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.
- offer a “just right” challenge that helps each student advance as an independent reader.
- ensure that, every day, students read texts that are within their control, given the strategies and knowledge they have.
- help students stretch their skills as readers, with increasingly challenging and conceptually rich texts.

### Promote Independent Reading

- help students discover their identities as readers and expand their understanding of the world.
- build strategic problem-solving skills that promote high-level comprehension.
- build a robust vocabulary and deepen analytical prowess and an ability to talk and write about text.
- offer innumerable academic and social-emotional benefits.

### Promote Independent Writing

- encourage writing for multiple purposes and audiences, across genres and modes—narrative, informational, and argumentative (opinion).
- help students control the traits of writing: ideas, voice, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, conventions, and presentation.
- help students use writing as a thinking tool to organize, consolidate, and integrate ideas.
- help students tap their creativity and strengthen their ability to compose.

### Integrate Reading and Writing

- reinforce reading and writing as reciprocal acts, with each informing the other.
- help students read to learn, write to learn, and make meaning in the process—the primary goal of instruction.
- realize the benefits of writing about text—and mirror the deep thinking that students should do when they read.
- enable students to be explicit about text evidence—writing information from their reading.

### Encourage Purposeful Reading and Writing

- help students engage in ambitious questioning and hands-on inquiry.
- foster critical thinking and problem-solving.
- encourage students to write clearly and convincingly, revising and editing their work to share it with a real audience.
- help students embrace their identities as purposeful and powerful readers and writers.

### Engage Families and the Community

- embrace the Dual-Capacity Framework and establish effective family-school partnerships that support children from cradle to career.
- build the collective partnership capacity between families and schools through the four C's: capabilities, connections, confidence, and cognition.
- help families understand the importance of immersing children in rich, ongoing conversation about daily home activities and read-aloud books.
- honor each family's cultural “funds of knowledge” while providing school-based scaffolds.

## Optimize Learning Supports

- maximize learning supports by fully integrating them into instruction and school management.
- provide physical, social, emotional, and academic assistance that enables students to succeed at school.
- provide responsive, personalized instruction that meets the needs of all learners.
- promote strong leadership that works to build a full continuum of essential school-community learning supports.



We show students we love them by looking after them as readers. We give them time every day to curl up with intriguing stories. We scour the shelves of bookstores and pore over reviews in search of titles that will delight them.

**And we acknowledge the essential “should” in teaching reading:** *every student should read for the pleasure of it.*

—Nancie Atwell

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# CREATING Equitable Learning Opportunities for All

Scholastic Education is dedicated to partnering with schools and districts to provide comprehensive literacy solutions that create equitable opportunities and support the academic and personal growth of every child—all day, every day, in and out of school.



Literacy  
Instruction



Professional  
Learning



Family & Community  
Engagement



SCHOLASTIC PRODUCES EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS TO ASSIST AND INSPIRE STUDENTS • TO CULTIVATE THEIR MINDS TO UTMOST CAPACITY • TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE • TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN ALL FIELDS OF LEARNING, LITERATURE, AND ART • TO SEEK EFFECTIVE WAYS TO LIVE A SATISFYING LIFE • TO ENLARGE STUDENTS' CONCERN FOR AND UNDERSTANDING OF TODAY'S WORLD • TO HELP BUILD A SOCIETY FREE OF PREJUDICE AND HATE, AND DEDICATED TO THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF LIFE IN COMMUNITY AND NATION • WE STRIVE TO PRESENT THE clearest explanation of current affairs and contemporary thought, and to encourage literary appreciation and expression consistent with the understanding and interests of young people at all levels of learning. • WE BELIEVE IN THE WORTH AND DIGNITY OF EACH INDIVIDUAL • RESPECT FOR THE DIVERSE GROUPS IN OUR MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY • THE RIGHT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO LIVE IN A WHOLESOME ENVIRONMENT, AND EQUALLY, THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH INDIVIDUAL TO HELP GAIN AND PRESERVE A DECENT AND HEALTHFUL ENVIRONMENT, BEGINNING WITH INFORMED CARE OF ONE'S OWN BODY AND MIND • HIGH MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES • THE DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE, WITH BASIC LIBERTIES – AND RESPONSIBILITIES – FOR EVERYONE • CONSTITUTIONAL, REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT, AND EVEN-HANDED JUSTICE THAT MAINTAINS EQUALITY OF RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE • RESPONSIBLE COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE AND RESPONSIBLE LABOR, WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL • COOPERATION AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL PEOPLE FOR THE PEACE OF THE WORLD • WE PLEDGE OURSELVES TO UPHOLD THE BASIC FREEDOMS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS • WE ARE UNALTERABLY OPPOSED TO ANY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT OR SOCIETY THAT DENIES THESE FREEDOMS • WE OPPOSE DISCRIMINATION OF ANY KIND ON THE BASIS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR, SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR IDENTITY, AGE, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN. • GOOD CITIZENS MAY HONESTLY DIFFER ON IMPORTANT PUBLIC QUESTIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL SIDES OF THE ISSUES OF OUR TIMES SHOULD BE FAIRLY DISCUSSED – WITH DEEP RESPECT FOR FACTS AND LOGICAL THINKING – IN CLASSROOM MAGAZINES, BOOKS, AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS USED IN SCHOOLS AND HOMES.

