

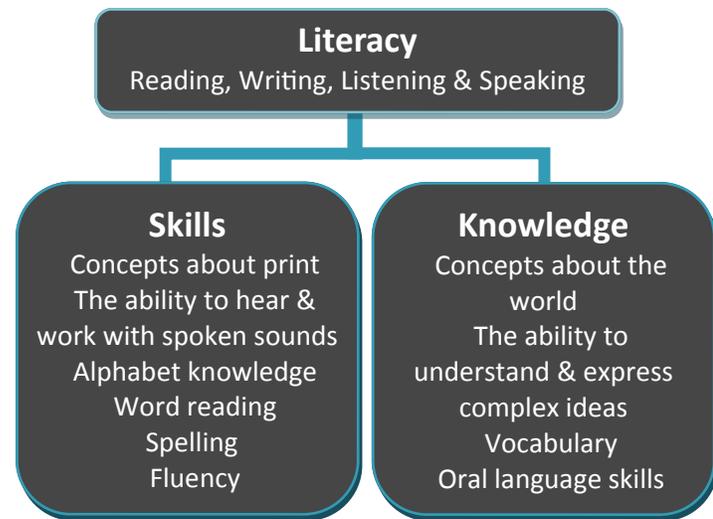
Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

LITERACY UNPACKED: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LITERACY?

The Issue: To make decisions that have a positive impact on children's literacy outcomes, leaders need a keen understanding of literacy itself. But literacy is a complex concept and there are many key misunderstandings about what, exactly, literacy is.

Unpacking Literacy Competencies

In this memo we focus specifically on two broad categories of literacy competencies: *skills*-based competencies and *knowledge*-based competencies.

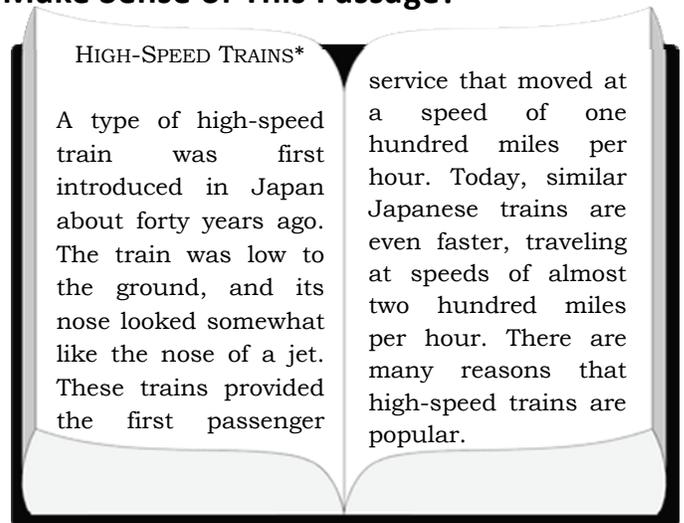


Why Is This Distinction Meaningful?

	Skills-Based Competencies	Knowledge-Based Competencies
Developmental Processes	Typically mastered by 3 rd grade	Develops from infancy through adulthood
Instructional Implications	Highly susceptible to relatively brief instruction	Requires sustained instruction, beginning in early childhood

With adequate instruction, skills-based competencies are mastered by 3rd grade for the average student. Yet the development of knowledge-based competencies must be supported with good instruction throughout schooling. For many children, especially from academically vulnerable populations, knowledge-based competencies are more likely to be key sources of academic difficulties.

What Competencies Does a Reader Need to Make Sense of This Passage?



* Passage adapted from Good & Kaminski (2007) *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills*, 6th ed.

Skills-Based Competencies	Map sounds onto letters (e.g., /s/ /p/ /ee/ /d/) and blend these to form a word (speed)
	Recognize spelling patterns (e.g., the “-igh” family found in the word “high”)
	Read fluently – about 115 words per minute

Knowledge-Based Competencies	Understand the meaning of words in this context (e.g., “service” has 37 possible definitions!)
	Make meaning of the text using relevant background knowledge (e.g., conceptual knowledge about trains and jets and travel)
	Use cognitive strategies (e.g., when reading the second sentence, if the child initially pictures a human nose, he must be able to adjust when the comparison to a jet’s nose is read)

The Bottom Line for PreK to 3rd Efforts:

Skills-based competencies are necessary but not sufficient for early literacy development; later reading comprehension and academic success depend mostly on strong knowledge-based competencies.

This series was made possible by the PreK-3rd Grade Initiative at Harvard Graduate School of Education and the generous funding of the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation. The content is informed in part by *Turning the Page: Refocusing Massachusetts for Reading Success*, commissioned by Strategies for Children.