



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
**CHARLOTTE**  
MEBANE EARLY LITERACY CENTER



# MELC Brief Series

## Translating Research for Literacy Educators

**SCORE 4:**  
**SUPPORTING READING COMPREHENSION  
IN UPPER ELEMENTARY GRADES**

**SCORE**   
Science of Comprehension for Reading Excellence

# READING COMPREHENSION: WHAT IS IT? (Davis, 2025)

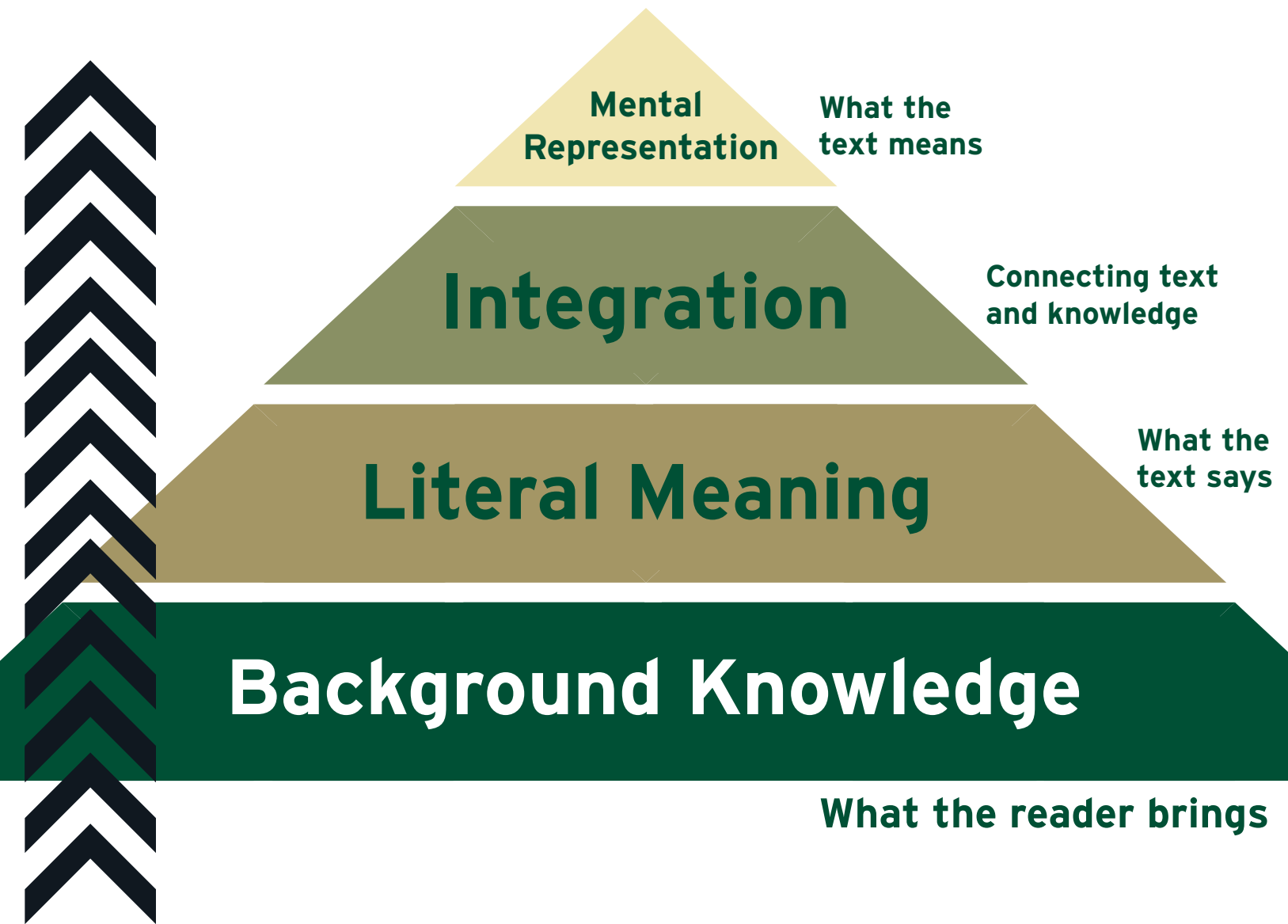
**Reading Comprehension** is the active process of building meaning from a text. Readers connect their prior knowledge and experiences with the author's ideas to construct a mental representation of the text. This process requires integrating vocabulary, language structures, background knowledge, and



READING  
COMPREHENSION  
=  
Forming a mental  
model of what the  
text means, not just  
what it says

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# Construction-Integration Model



## Comprehension builds through layers

Reading comprehension develops through layered mental representations. Readers first construct literal meaning from text, then integrate that meaning with their prior knowledge to build a coherent mental representation of what the text means.

# TWO DOMAINS OF READING COMPREHENSION

## Word Recognition

- Recognizing words accurately and automatically

## Language Comprehension

- Vocabulary knowledge
- Syntax and sentence structure
- Background knowledge
- Inferencing and reasoning

# WHY TEACHER KNOWLEDGE MATTERS

Teachers need specialized knowledge of reading comprehension processes, strategies, and content to effectively support students.

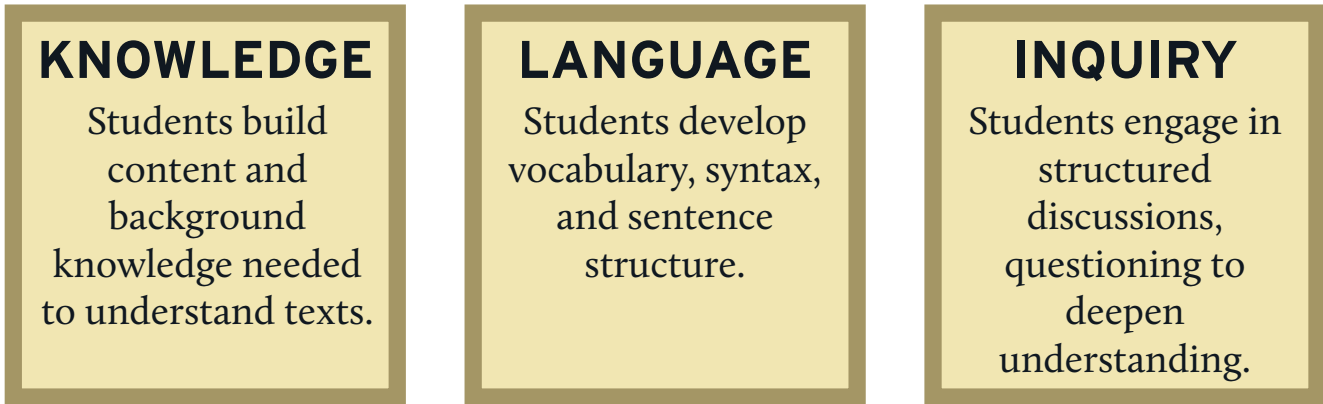
This includes understanding:

- Vocabulary and morphology
- Text structure
- Inferencing and meaning-making
- Background knowledge development
- Instructional scaffolding

Teacher knowledge directly influences instructional decisions and indirectly influences student reading performance.

# THE K.L.I. FRAMEWORK: THREE PILLARS OF COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

The Knowledge, Language, and Inquiry (K.L.I.) framework strengthens comprehension, vocabulary, and student engagement by integrating three components:



## Core Instructional Components of K.L.I.

Component	Purpose	What It Looks Like
Discovery Reading	Build knowledge and vocabulary	Guided reading and discussion
Confident Reading	Develop fluency and understanding	Repeated reading of connected texts
Uncover the Structure	Teach text organization	Identifying and analyzing text structures
Breaking Words	Develop vocabulary knowledge	Studying morphemes
Sentence Workshop	Strengthen language comprehension	Constructing and analyzing sentences

These routines provide structured, scaffolded support for comprehension development.

# INSTRUCTIONAL MOVES THAT SUPPORT COMPREHENSION

Effective teachers intentionally support comprehension by:

- Building background knowledge before reading
- Teaching vocabulary explicitly
- Teaching morphology explicitly
- Teaching students to identify text structure
- Supporting inferencing and meaning-making
- Using structured routines and scaffolded instruction
- Engaging students in inquiry and discussion
- Connecting new information to prior knowledge



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1** Reading comprehension requires **knowledge, language, and inference**, developed through inquiry-based instruction.
- 2** **Teacher knowledge** is essential for effective reading instruction.
- 3** **Vocabulary, language, and background knowledge** drive comprehension.
- 4** **Inquiry-based** instruction strengthens engagement and understanding, when it's carefully structured and scaffolded.

## Citations

Davis, D.S. (2025). Upper elementary teachers' specialized knowledge of the components and processes of reading comprehension. In S. Neuman & M. Kuhn (Eds.), *Handbook on the Science of Literacy in Grades 3-8* (pp. 383-408). Guilford.

Relyea, J.E., Davis, D.S., Dobis, C., Huang, B., & Samuelson, C. (2025). Feasibility of the Knowledge, Language, and Inquiry (K.L.I.) intervention for multilingual English learners. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 118(2), 131-146.

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