Meaning Making

Meaning making is at the heart of ELA/Literacy and ELD instruction. Meaning making should be the central purpose for interacting with text, producing text, participating in discussions, giving presentations, and engaging in research. Meaning making includes literal comprehension but is not confined to it *at any grade* or *with any student*. Inference making and critical reading are given substantial and explicit attention in every discipline.

The reading standards for both literary and informational text clearly focus on meaning making. Students demonstrate literal and inferential comprehension (RL/RI.K-12.1; RH/RST.6-12.1). They determine the themes or main idea(s) in texts, drawing on key details, and summarize texts (RL/RI.K-12.2; H/RST.6-12.2). Students describe literary elements in depth, drawing on key details, and compare and contrast them (RL.K-12.3). They explain components of informational text, including the relationships among them (RI.K-12.3; RH/RST.6-12.3). Reading standards related to craft focus on students’ understanding of how the authors’ choices about language and structure, including point of view and purpose, impact meaning (RL/RI.K-12.4-6; RH/RST.6-12.4-6). Reading standards related to integration of knowledge and ideas require students to make connections between and analyze different presentations of information (such as text and visual and multimedia elements), including authors’ use of reasons and evidence to support points in informational text, and to extend their thinking and integrate information across texts (RLRI.K-12.4-6; RH/RST.6-12.7-9). Figure 2.6 provides a definition of meaning making as it relates to reading.
Figure 2.6. A Definition of Meaning Making as a Reader

The term *meaning making* when referring to reading is synonymous with the term *reading comprehension*. The *ELA/ELD Framework* uses the definition provided by Snow (2002, xiii): Reading comprehension is “the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.” The Institute for Education Sciences Practice Guide *Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade* (Shanahan, and others 2010, 5) notes, “Extracting meaning is to understand what an author has stated, explicitly or implicitly. Constructing meaning is to interpret what an author has said by bringing one’s ‘capacities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences’ to bear on what he or she is reading. These personal characteristics also may affect the comprehension process.”

The writing standards, too, reflect an emphasis on meaning. Students write opinion pieces and arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives (W.K-12.1-3; WHST.6-12.1-2) clearly and logically to convey meaning. They produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to the task and purpose, which, with guidance and support, is revised and edited to ensure effective communication, and which employs digital tools. As noted in the CCR for Writing (CDE 2013, 20), students “learn to appreciate that a key purpose of writing is to communicate clearly” to a range of audiences (W.2-12.4; W.K-12.5-6; WHST.6-12.4-6). They also make meaning as they conduct research projects, building and presenting knowledge they have gained and drawing evidence from texts to support analysis, reflection, and research (W.K-12.7-8;WHST.6-12.7-8) In short, writing is a meaningful act.
The Speaking and Listening strand of the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy also centers on meaning making as students learn to communicate ideas. Students engage in a range of collaborative discussions about texts and grade level content, sharing and exploring ideas (SL.K-12.1). They learn to summarize the meaning of texts read aloud and information presented in diverse media and formats (SL.K-12.2-3). In addition, they learn to present information so that others understand, using media to enhance main ideas and themes (SL.K-12.4-5). Importantly, they use language appropriate to the task and situation in meaningful exchanges (SL.K-12.6).

Standards in the language strand, too, include a focus on meaning making. Students learn to determine and clarify the meaning of unknown words and phrases using a variety of strategies; understand figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and expand their vocabulary so that they can comprehend text and content and express ideas at their grade level (L.K-12.4-6). And, they gain control over conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics (L.K- 12.1-2 and L.2-12.3), allowing them to convey meaning effectively.