

Strategies for Building Comprehension of Informational Text

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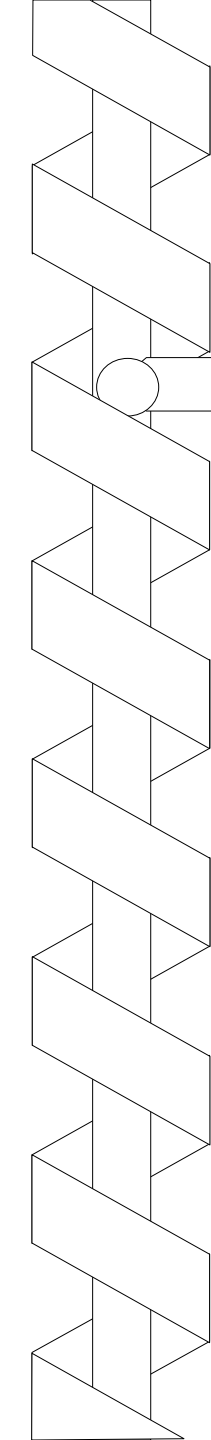
Some References for Material in this Talk

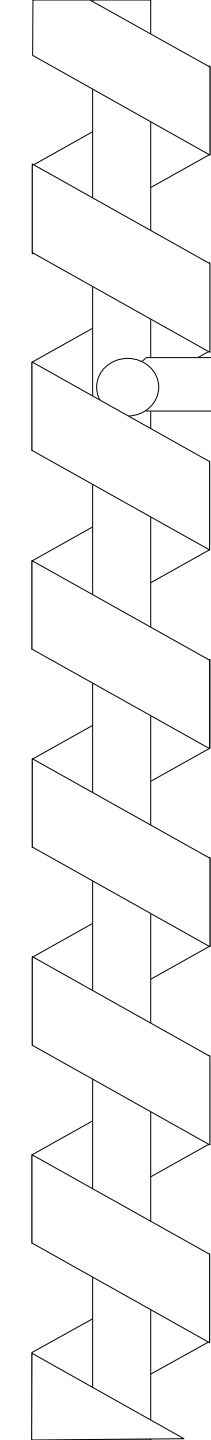
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What is Informational Text?

- ✎ Briefly, I define informational text as text whose primary purpose is to convey information about the natural or social world, and that has particular linguistic features to accomplish that purpose.
- ✎ I do not view informational text as synonymous with “nonfiction.” Rather, I view informational genres as a type of nonfiction. Other types of nonfiction include biography, nonfiction narrative, concept books, and others.

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- Informational text is often read differently than some other kinds of text such as fictional narrative text. For example, it is often read nonlinearly, selectively, and at a pace that varies from place to place in the text.
 - Researchers have identified some common features of informational texts for young children, such as timeless verb constructions, technical vocabulary, and graphical devices.



Some Background about Comprehension of Informational Text

- Large proportions of American students have difficulty comprehending informational text.
- Low-income and minority students are particularly likely to struggle.
- Some have attributed the “fourth grade slump” to difficulties with informational text.
- Lower achievement in science may also be linked to difficulties comprehending informational text.
- Nearly 44 million adults cannot extract information from text in many circumstances.



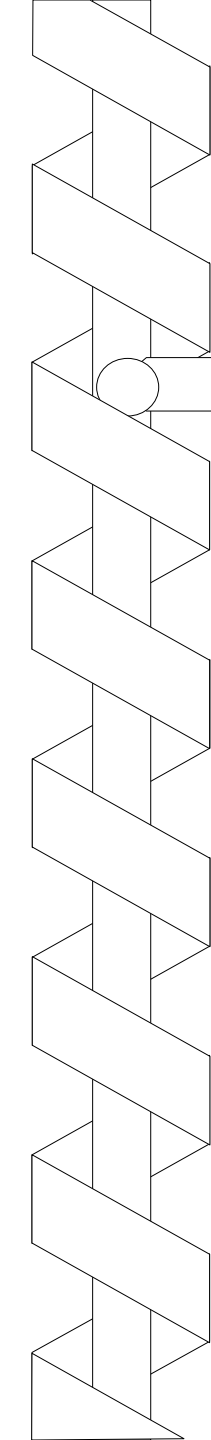
The importance of comprehension of informational text

- We live in the “information age.”
- The majority of reading and writing adults do is non-fiction, much of it informational.
- Informational text can build vocabulary and new knowledge.
- Some students actually prefer reading and writing informational text, and thrive with it.
- Informational text is an important tool for answering questions and solving problems, and for raising questions and posing problems.



Ten Strategies for Building Comprehension of Informational Text

1. Have a clear vision of effective comprehension of informational text.
2. Increase exposure to and instructional time with informational text.
3. Start early to lay a foundation for learning from text.
4. Provide many opportunities to read and be read to.
5. Accord appropriate attention to underlying skills and dispositions.

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6. Teach strategies for comprehending informational text.
 7. Foster rich talk with and about informational text.
 8. Make reading-writing connections with informational text.
 9. Increase attention to the unique and challenging characteristics of informational text.
 10. Promote use of informational text for authentic purposes as much as possible.



1. Have a Clear Vision of Effective Comprehension of Informational Text.

This can draw on:

- ∞ National, state, and local priorities, for example as articulated in standards documents
- ∞ Research and theory, for example related to what good readers do when they read



What Good Readers Do When They Read

- ☞ Good readers are active readers.
- ☞ From the outset they have clear goals in mind for their reading. They constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals.
- ☞ Good readers typically look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.
- ☞ As they read, good readers frequently make predictions about what is to come.
- ☞ They read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading--what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, what to re-read, and so on.

- ☞ Good readers construct, revise, and question the meanings they make as they read.
- ☞ They draw upon, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text.
- ☞ They think about the authors of the text, their style, beliefs, intentions, historical milieu, and so on.
- ☞ They monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary.
- ☞ Good readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and they deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed.
- ☞ They evaluate the text's quality and value, and react to the text in a range of ways, both intellectually and emotionally.

☞ Good readers read different kinds of text differently.

For example:

☞ when reading narrative, good readers attend closely to the setting and characters;

☞ when reading informational text these readers frequently construct and revise summaries of what they have read.

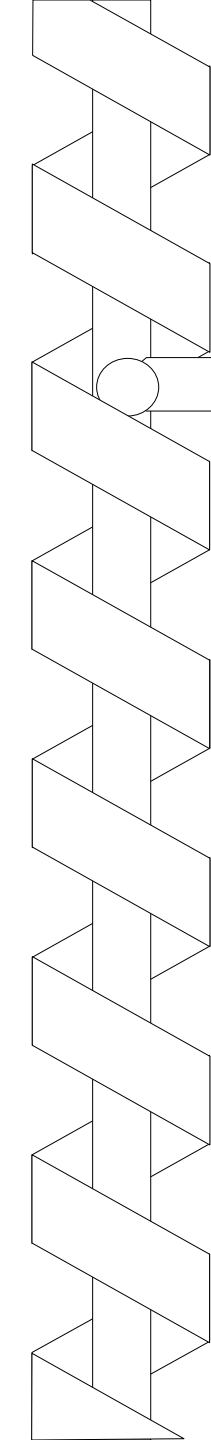
☞ For good readers, text processing occurs not only during ‘reading’ as we have traditionally defined it, but also during short breaks taken during reading, even after the ‘reading’ itself has commenced, even after the ‘reading’ has ceased.

☞ Comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive.



2. Increase Exposure To and Instructional Time with Informational Text.

- ☞ Informational text is scarce in primary grade classrooms, and perhaps at other grade levels as well.
- ☞ Data from analyses of basal reading series (e.g., Hoffman et al., 1994; Moss & Newton, 1998)
- ☞ Data from teacher surveys (e.g., Pressley, Rankin, Yokoi, 1996; Yopp & Yopp, 2000)
- ☞ Data from classroom observation (e.g., Duke, 2000; Kamberelis, 1998)



Increasing exposure to and instructional time with informational text does not seem to harm, and may help, literacy development.

➔ **NAEP Findings**

➔ (e.g., Dreher, 1998/1999)

➔ **Reports from Teachers**

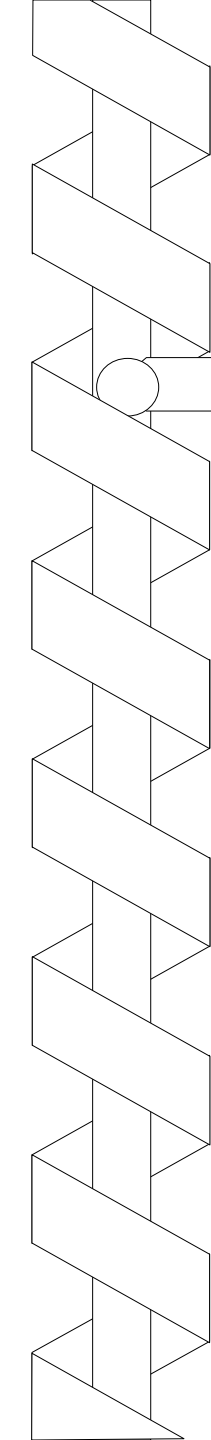
➔ (e.g., Duthie, 1996, Kamil & Lane, 1997)

➔ **Case studies**

➔ (e.g., Caswell & Duke, 1998)

➔ **Early Literacy Project Study** (a test of the Genre Diversification Framework, or GDF, described on the following slides -- results showed no harm and some benefits)

➔ (Duke, Martineau, Frank, & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Duke, 2003)



The Genre Diversification Framework (GDF): A framework for increasing exposure to and instructional time with informational text

- Among texts of three or more related sentences teachers aim for:
 - 1/3 informational genres,
 - 1/3 narrative genres,
 - 1/3 other genres
- Teachers diversify within three areas:
 - classroom libraries
 - the classroom print environment
 - classroom activities



The Genre Diversification Framework (GDF), cont.

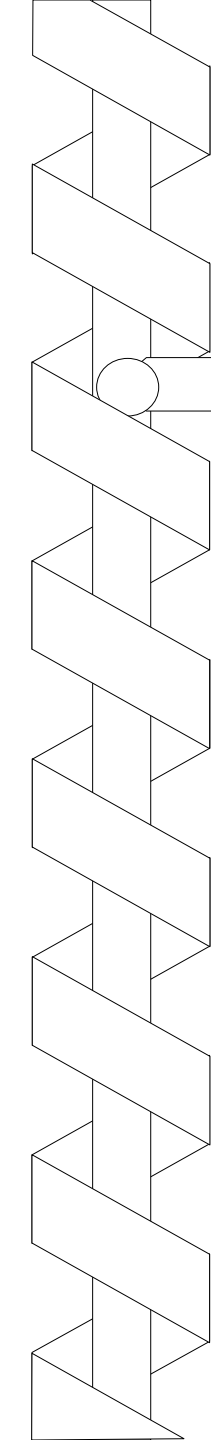
- Teachers diversify:
 - within activities (e.g., read aloud)
 - across the school day (e.g., language arts, science)
 - across the school year (e.g., themes, units)
- Framework does not call for other changes in classroom or curriculum, though they may occur.

Genre Categories for the GDF

Briefly, for the purposes of this study the genre categories were distinguished as follows:

	Narrative Genres	Informational Genres	Other Genres
Primary Purpose	To entertain or convey an experience	To convey information about the natural or social world	Varies by genre
Typical Organization	Temporally for all or nearly all of the text	Topically for all or nearly all of the text	Varies by genre
Some Other Key Features	Includes characters Is goal-based in some way	Uses timeless verbs Uses generic nouns	Vary by genre
Typically read	Linearly As a whole	Linearly or nonlinearly In parts	Varies by genre
Examples	fairy tales, mysteries, fables, true stories, personal narratives, historical fiction	'all about' books, question and answer books, most reference books	poetry, biography, menus, instructions, rules

(We also categorized some texts as narrative-informational, meaning that they had purposes and features characteristic of both narrative and informational genres.)



3. Start Early to Lay a Foundation for Learning from Text.

- Early childhood is an important time for:
 - Developing knowledge about functions of print;
 - Developing habits and dispositions related to reading and writing;
 - Developing important knowledge that can be learned through or with informational text.
 - Developing skills and strategies that can be taught through and with informational texts.
- Young children can learn from text.
- Informational text can be developmentally appropriate for young children.



Developmentally Appropriate?

- ➡ Very little research has been conducted on informational text with children birth - 6.
- ➡ The research that has been conducted suggests that young children can interact successfully with informational text (Duke & Kays, 1998; Maduram, 2000; Pelligrini, et al., 1990; Shine & Roser, 1999; Tower, 2002).
- ➡ Some young children actually prefer informational texts and many do not have strong preferences for any one type of text (Kletzien & Szabo, 1998, with slightly older children).

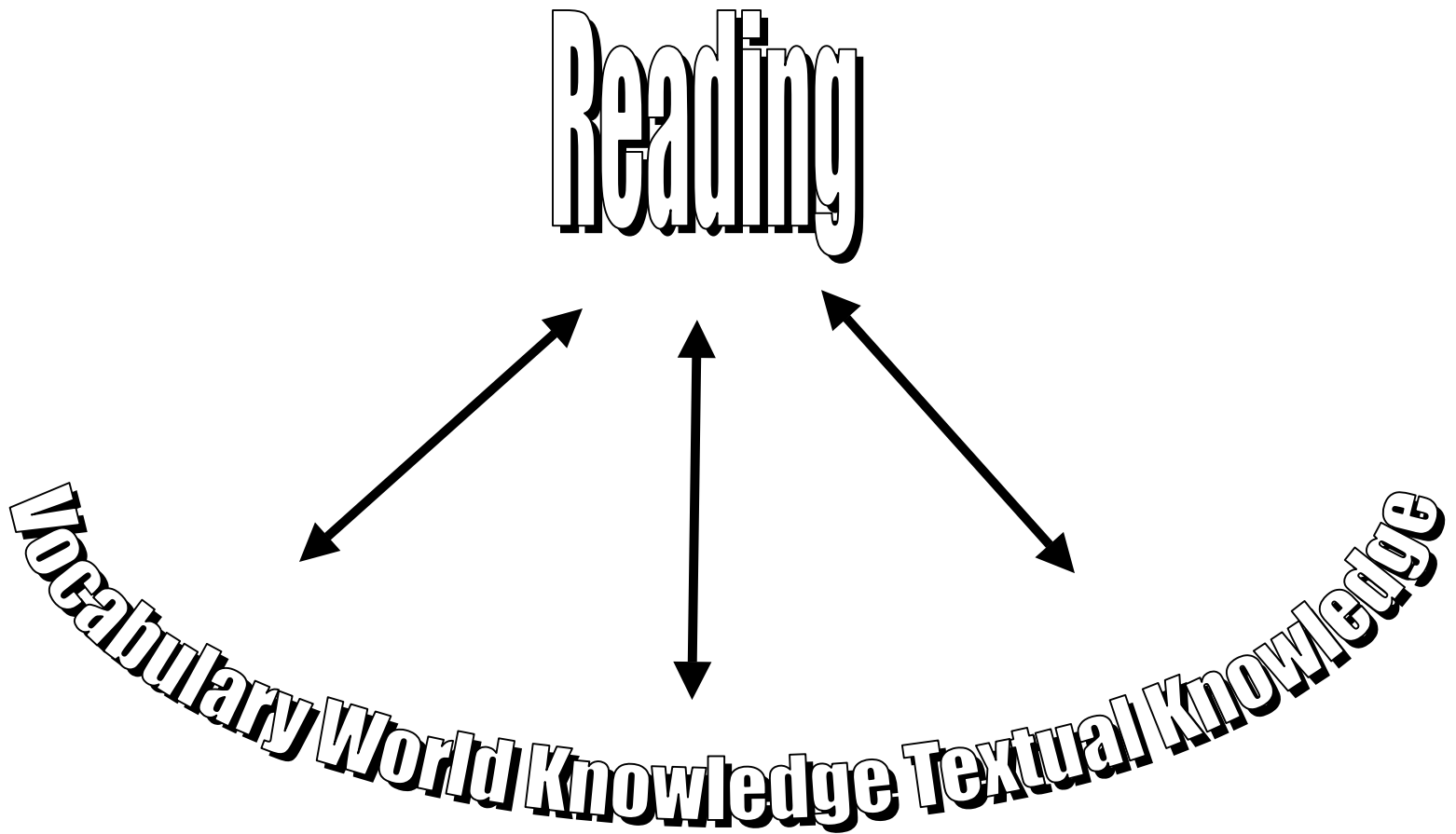


4. Accord Appropriate Attention to Underlying Skills and Dispositions.

- ☞ Intentional/functional knowledge
- ☞ Concepts of print
- ☞ Phonemic Awareness *
- ☞ Word recognition and decoding *
- ☞ Reading fluency *
- ☞ Vocabulary *
- ☞ Active and reflective learning stance
- ☞ Engagement in reading and learning

* A component in the NRP Report

5. Provide Many Opportunities to Read and Be Read To.





6. Teach Strategies for Comprehending Informational Text.

Some strategies shown to improve comprehension if taught, even individually:

- ➡ Monitoring and adjusting as needed
- ➡ Activating and applying relevant prior knowledge (including making predictions)
- ➡ Questions and questioning
- ➡ Think aloud
- ➡ Attending to and uncovering text structure
- ➡ Constructing visual representations
- ➡ Summarizing

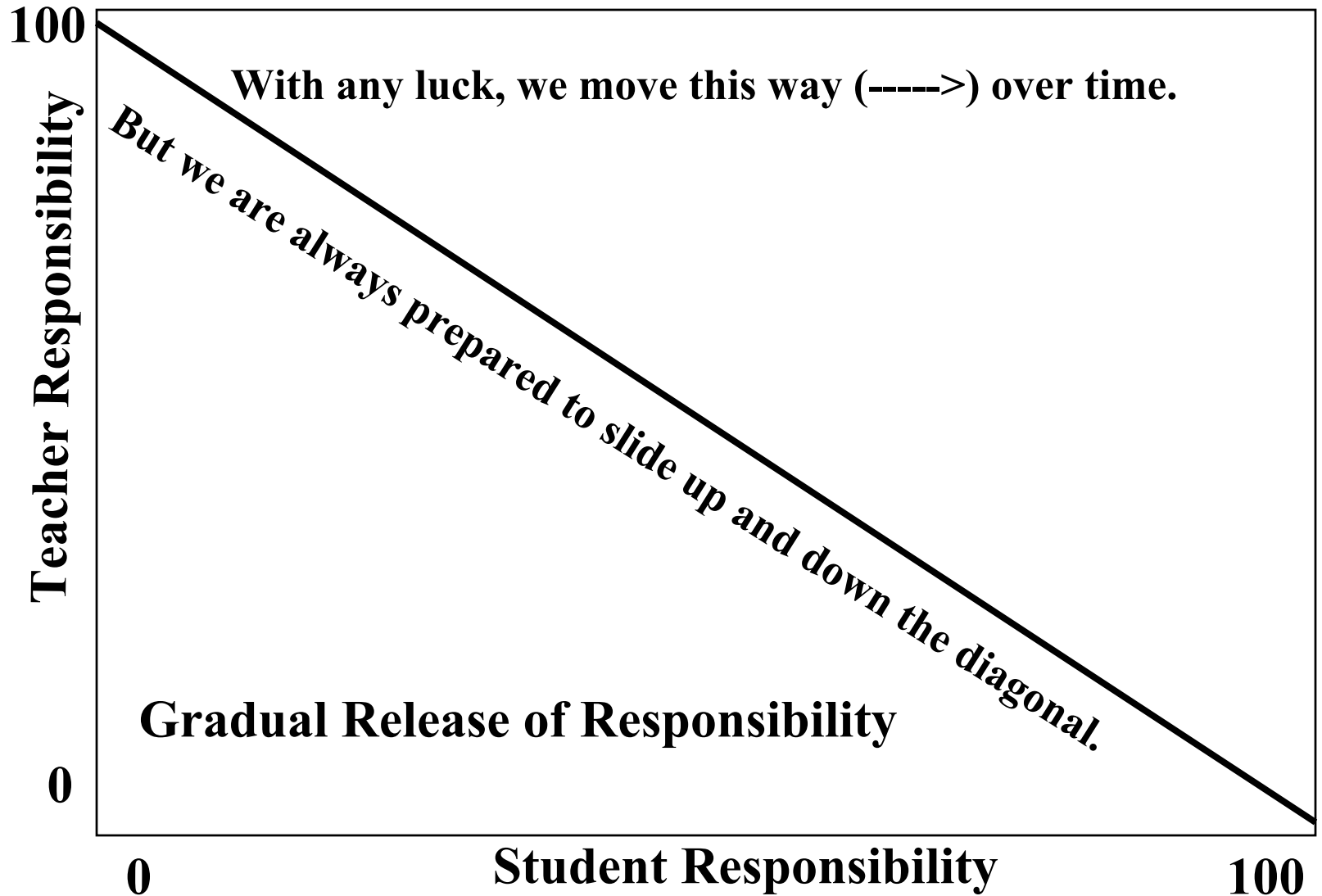
(Duke & Pearson, 2002)



Five components of teaching comprehension strategies

- (1) An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.
- (2) Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action
- (3) Collaborative use of the strategy in action.
- (4) Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility.
- (5) Independent use of the strategy.

A key instructional construct:





Teaching multiple strategies simultaneously may be particularly powerful (Duke & Pearson, 2002,; NRP, 2000; Pressley, 2000).

Some approaches seem to have been tested entirely or primarily with narrative texts (e.g., Explicit Explanation: Duffy et al, 1987; SAIL: Pressley et al., 1994).

Others have been tested with informational texts (e.g., Metacognitive curriculum: Paris et al, 1986; Reciprocal teaching: Paris, Cross, & Lipson, 1984).

In the next two slides I provide some detail about one approach that has been tested (and shown to be effective) with informational text.



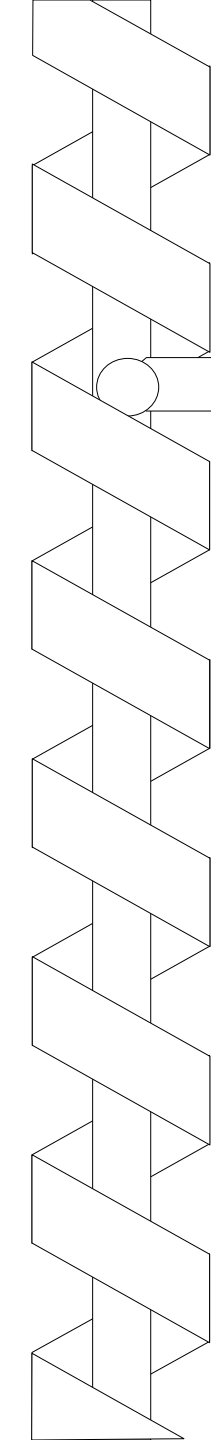
Collaborative Strategic Reading

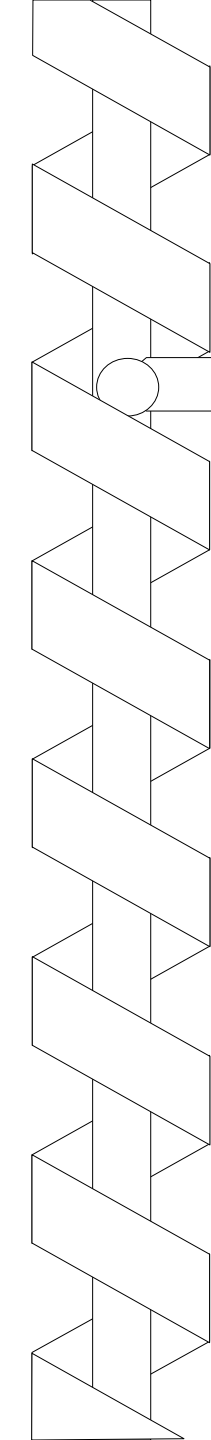
(Klingner and Vaughn, 1999)

(See also Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)

Has elements of reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning.

- Students work in small, cooperative groups
- Students apply four comprehension strategies:
 - Preview (think about what they already know, predict what the passage might be about)
 - “Click and clunk” (monitor comprehension, use fix-up strategies as needed)
 - Get the gist (glean and restate the most important idea)
 - Wrap up (summarize, ask questions)

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- Students have specific roles: leader, clunk expert, gist expert, announcer, encourager
 - Cue cards may be used to support students in small, cooperative groups
 - E.g., a clunk card that says: “Reread the sentences before and after the clunk looking for cues.”
 - E.g., a student leader cue card that says: “Did everyone understand what we read? If you did not, write your clunks in your learning log.”



➡ **Students complete learning logs before and after reading**

➡ **Before reading: preview**

➡ What I already know about the topic.

➡ What I predict I will learn.

➡ **During reading**

➡ Clunks

➡ **After reading wrap-up**

➡ Questions about the important ideas in the passage.

➡ What I learned from the text.



7. Foster Rich Talk with and about Informational Text.

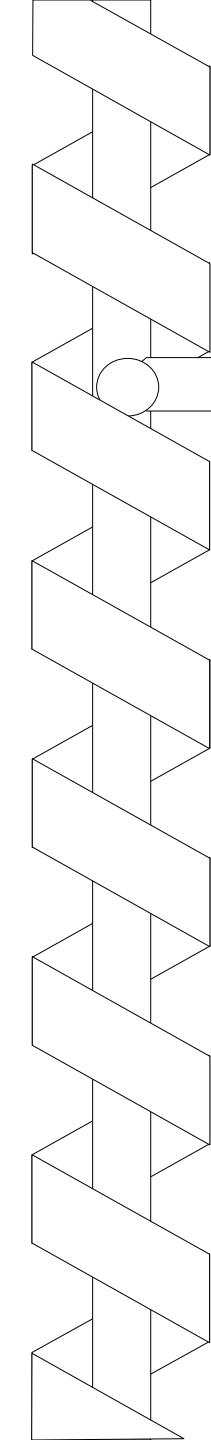
- ☞ Text discussion
 - ☞ Questions and questioning (teacher and student)
 - ☞ Think-alouds (teacher and student)
 - ☞ Instructional Conversations
 - ☞ E-T-R
 - ☞ Others
- ☞ Engaging and sustaining texts

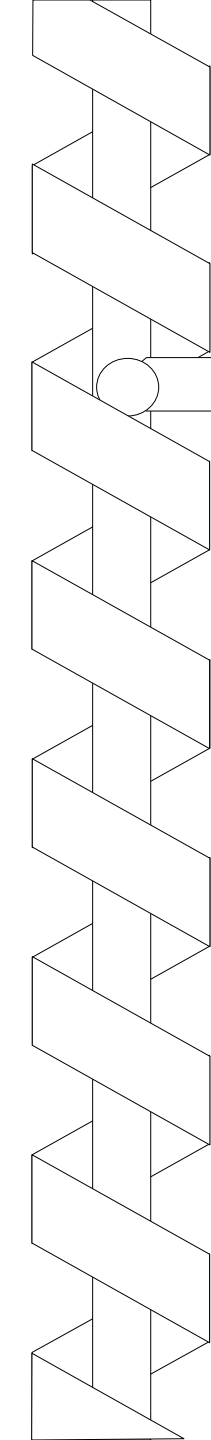


8. Make reading-writing connections with informational text.

For example:

- ☞ **Elicit reviews of informational texts** (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
 - ☞ Can be posted in the classroom
 - ☞ Can be passed on to other classes
 - ☞ Can be posted on the Web (e.g., www.kidsreads.com, www.kidsbookshelf.com, www.spaghetlibookclub.org, www.amazon.com)
- ☞ **Study informational text authors** (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
- ☞ **Improve a text**
 - ☞ For example, adding a definition of a word, adding a table or chart, adding an index

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- **Use paragraph frames** (Cudd & Roberts, 1989; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
 - “Bats are unusual animals for several reasons. First . . . Second. . . Third. . . . Finally. . . . As you can see, bats are unique in the animal world”
 - “A lot of important information was missing from this book. For example. . . Another example is. . . I suggest that the author. . .”
 - **Engage students in “innovations” based on informational texts** (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)
 - **Have children engage in more open-ended writing of informational text** (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003)



9. Increase Attention to the Unique and Especially Challenging Characteristics of Informational Text.

There is evidence to support:

- ➡ Explicitly teaching strategies that are important to comprehending informational text (see earlier strategies, think also of strategies more specific to informational text, such as searching, skimming, scanning)
- ➡ Providing strong vocabulary instruction
- ➡ So far not much support for explicitly teaching features of informational text



Strong vocabulary instruction:

- Involves lots of time spent reading
- Involves lots of rich talk and talk about text
- Teaches important words
- Teaches conceptually-related words
- Relates new words to known words
- Exposes children to words multiple times in multiple meaningful contexts
- Raises word consciousness

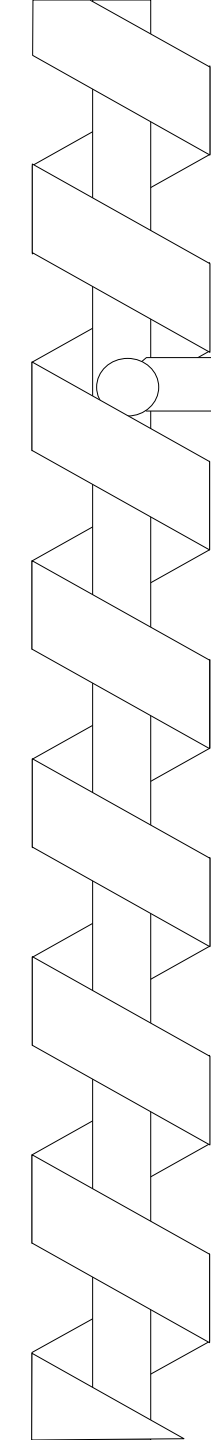
(Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Duke & Moses, 2003)



10. Promote Use of Informational Text for Authentic Purposes as Much as Possible.

- Authentic literacy events are those that replicate or reflect reading and writing purposes and texts, specific to the genre, that occur in the world outside of a schooling context.
- Authentic reading of informational text involves reading for the purpose of obtaining information you want or need to know (and writing for the purpose of communicating information to people who want or need to know it).

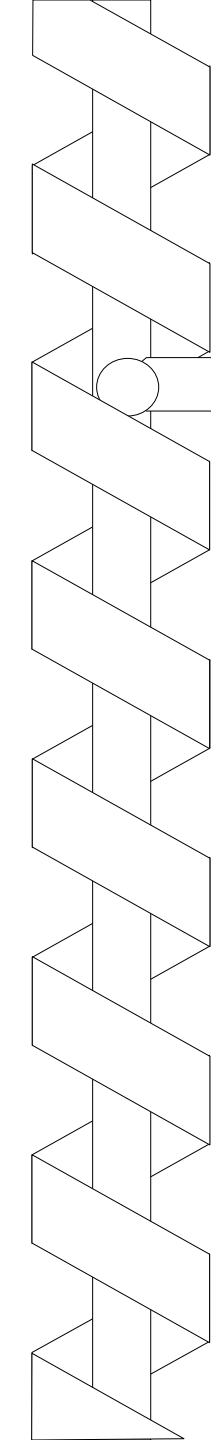
(Purcell-Gates & Duke, 2001)



Some set-ups for authentic reading of informational text in science in the TEXT approach

- Discrepant events to generate questions
 - E.g., prisms on the overhead
- Demonstrations of phenomena to generate questions
 - E.g., volcano, caterpillars
- Serendipitous events brought from world outside
 - E.g., broken arm
- Announcing topic and asking for questions
 - E.g., K-W-L charts (topic: sound)

(Purcell-Gates, Duke, Hall, & Tower, 2002)



Some set-ups for authentic reading and writing in science in the TEXT approach

- ☞ Literacy in response to a community need
 - ☞ E.g. pond brochure
- ☞ Literacy as part of problem-solving
 - ☞ E.g. dying tadpoles

(Audience integral to authentic writing -- audiences include distant readers (e.g., Costa Rican pen pals), within-school audiences, and within-classroom audiences)

(Purcell-Gates, Duke, Hall, & Tower, 2002; note connections with CORI (*Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004))