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CHAPTER 3

Keeping the End Goal in Mind

Teaching for Knowledge and Comprehension Gains

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The goal of reading instruction throughout a child's life is to build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that lead to lifelong learning. We are all aware that what we know and can do today is not what adults 20 or 30 years from now will need to know and be able to do. The world is rapidly changing and the future of today's children lies in being seekers and critical users of information.

In very effective classrooms, children do have opportunities to see the ABCs, explore books, and write frequently. However, they are doing so much more—they are engaged in investigations of interesting topics. Knowledge drives the curriculum in these classrooms while letters and sounds are learned along the path of discovery (Neuman, 2006). Thus, much whole-class instruction will be centered around powerful themes. In excellent prevention literacy programs, teachers spend considerable time preparing for theme teaching.

This chapter is about how teachers can help children build knowledge and information. In classrooms where the goal is knowledge and comprehension, teachers guide children's explorations of books, media materials, objects, and investigations rather than merely give children information. Children's discovery of new information is dependent on our skillful sharing of books and other printed or media texts, such as Internet sites, YouTube videos, and apps. We carefully consider the concepts we want children to discover and learn about, building understandings of meaningful themes and developing enriched concepts and sophisticated vocabularies. We want children to grapple with ideas, to think, and to gain new knowledge, not merely to memorize. To achieve this, we help children develop strategies for gaining information and understanding what we share with them through read-alouds and media sharing. We help children to learn new vocabulary words and use them to communicate their own meanings about expanding concepts.

READING BOOKS ALOUD AND SHARING MEDIA: BUILDING TOWARD CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS

Interactive Read-Alouds

Interactive read-alouds involve interactions among the teacher's reading, the teacher's comments and questions, and the children's comments and questions. Rather than merely reading aloud, during interactive read-alouds teachers demonstrate how they think while reading and how they pose questions regarding things they are wondering about. From teachers' demonstrations, children learn to make comments that reflect their thinking and wondering. In the following interactive read-aloud, Cindy (a preschool teacher) and Jeremie read and discuss the pop-up book *Dinnertime* (Pienkowski, 1980). In this story a series of animals, illustrated with large pop-up mouths, announce they will eat another animal, the one the reader has seen on the previous page of the story. The conversation (with the text from the book presented in *italics*) is in both Haitian Creole (Jeremie's home language) and American English (Ballenger, 1999, p. 62).

MS. CINDY: (reads first double spread of text) *One day a frog . . .*

JEREMIE: He got mouth?

MS. CINDY: . . . *was sitting on a log catching flies when down came a vulture.*

JEREMIE: Cindy, he got mouth.

MS. CINDY: Yes, they all have mouths [reads second double spread of text] *Vulture said to frog "I'm going to eat you for my dinner"* [pointing to vulture] m pral manje ou (I'm gonna eat you) *and that's what he did.*

JEREMIE: Li di li pral manje moun? (he said he will eat people?)

MS. CINDY: Non, li mem, li di, "m pral manje ou" (no, that one he said, "I will eat you.")

JEREMIE: Manje on frog (eat a frog?)

MS. CINDY: Yeah, li pral manje on frog (he will eat a frog).

In this interactive read-aloud Jeremie commented twice on the pop-up mouths. Cindy only briefly acknowledged the mouths, then quickly returned to reading the text. She alternated between reading the text in English and repeating the essence of the text in Haitian Creole. Jeremie signaled by asking a question ("he said he will eat people?") that he was confused about whom the vulture intended to eat. It is not surprising that Jeremie was confused. The text refers only indirectly to the frog, which is not illustrated on this page. In order to understand the story, children must infer that the vulture is going to eat the frog that they have seen on the previous page (the text only says "I'm going to eat *you* for my dinner"). Jeremie's question shows that he incorrectly inferred that the vulture will eat people, probably based on his prior knowledge about dangerous animals. To rectify this misunderstanding, Cindy pointed to the animals in the illustrations and made explicit which animal is going to do the eating and which animal is going to be eaten. Then Jeremie asked another question, which served to confirm his understanding that the frog will get eaten, and Cindy's response provided feedback that he was correct. Cindy intentionally expanded Jeremie's language by recasting some of his language ("he got mouth?" and "eat a frog?") into a more conventional response

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("they all have mouths" and "he will eat a frog"). The use of interactive read-alouds, including the give-and-take between teachers and children, has been shown to increase children's vocabulary development (Mol, Bus, & De Jong, 2009).

Reading Complex Narratives Aloud: It Takes Three Reads

What Are High-Quality, Complex Narratives and Why Should We Read Them?

Narratives are stories with characters who are placed in particular settings, face problems, and take action to solve problems but are confronted with obstacles. Facing obstacles creates tension and drama, often allowing characters to mature. High-quality narratives are distinguished by richness of vocabulary and language, complexity of character and plot, insightful themes, and interplay between text and illustrations (Sipe, 2008). These qualities provide opportunities to learn about higher level vocabulary (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013) and use higher-level thinking that calls on integration of content from the story and the child's knowledge (McGinty & Justice, 2010). For example, teachers can say "*Quivering*. That's a good word! Why do you suppose he was quivering when he saw the giant?" or "Oh dear! She has to get to the other side. How do you suppose she will solve that problem?" or "Have you ever heard of a *tchotchke*? What do you think that might be?" or "I wonder why he's hiding from Tony? What do we already know about Tony?" or "I think there's a clue in the picture. What do you see in the picture that tells you why she 'jumped for joy'?" Notice that high-quality narratives allow teachers to draw attention to vocabulary, critical story events, and inferred internal states of characters.

Books that are particularly appropriate for younger preschoolers include characters and activities that are familiar to children, texts with few words, and illustrations with direct relationship to the story line. However, children also love to grapple with books that have complex characters, activities that are unfamiliar and even mysterious, and illustrations that are intentionally in opposition to the story text. For example, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit,* written by Beatrix Potter in 1902, continues to be a favorite even of children living in 21st-century inner cities! High-quality narratives accurately reflect diverse cultures with authentic voices and illustrations (Barrera, Ligouri, & Salas, 1992). Figure 3.1 provides a list of culturally authentic books appropriate for the read-aloud program.

First Read of a Book: Pushing In Ideas and Demonstrating Thinking

The most natural way that teachers read books is to intersperse their reading with questions. Researchers have discovered that questions teachers ask range along a continuum of difficulty (van Kleeck, Vander Woude, & Hammett, 2006). Some questions draw children's attention to details in the illustrations, and these questions are the easiest to answer, requiring only one or two words. Other questions require a few more words to answer but also draw attention to literal information stated in the text or found in the illustrations. They are moderate in difficulty. The most difficult questions require children to infer something based on the text but not explicitly stated or illustrated. These

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Marie Bradby (1995). *More Than Anything Else.* Orchard.
Eve Bunting (2006). *One Green Apple.* Clarion.
Yangsook Choi (2001). *The Name Jar.* Dell Dragonfly.
Caron Lee Cohen (1988). *The Mud Pony.* Scholastic.
Niki Daly (1999). *Jamela's Dress*. Frances Lincoln.
Arthur Dorros (1991). *Abuela.* Penguin.
Kristyn Rehling Estes (1999). *Manuela's Gift.* Chronicle.
Carmen Lomas Garza (2005). *Cuadros de familia/Family Pictures.* Children's Book Press.
Lucia Gonzalez (1999). *The Bossy Gallito/El gallode bodas*. Scholastic.
Francisco Jiménez (1998). *La mariposa.* Houghton Mifflin.
Tony Johnston (2001). *Uncle Rain Cloud.* Charlesbridge.
Ellen Levin (2007). *Henry's Freedom Box.* Scholastic.
Grace Lin (2003). *Dim Sum for Everyone.* Dragonfly.
Lenore Look (2001). *Henry's First-Moon Birthday.* Atheneum.
Alejandro Martinez. *La mujer que brillaba aún más que el so/The Woman Who Outshone the Sun.* Children's Book Press.
Pat Mora (2000). *Tomas and the Library Lady.* Dragonfly.
S. D. Nelson (1999). *Gift Horse: A Lakota Story.* Abrams.
Jose-Luis Orozco (2002). *Diez deditos/Ten Little Fingers and Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America.* Puffin.
Helen Recorvits (2003). *My Name Is Yoon.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Allen Say (2009). *Tea with Milk.* HMH Books.
Gary Soto (1996). *Too Many Tamales.* Puffin.
Janet Wong (2000). *This Next New Year.* Frances Foster.
Jacqueline Woodson (2001). *The Other Side.* Putnam.
Yin (2003). *Coolies.* Puffin.
Yin (2006). *Brothers.* Philomel.

FIGURE 3.1. Culturally authentic books (realistic fiction or folk tales about underrepresented cultural groups in the United States) for prekindergarten and kindergarten children.

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questions call upon higher levels of thinking, and answering them often requires sophisticated and extended syntax. While questions at the lower end are useful in engaging children's attention, only questions at the higher end extend children's thinking and their syntax. Thus, teachers should be aware of the kinds of questions they ask.

Most teachers are used to reading books and stopping along the way to make comments and ask children questions. However, they are often disappointed when only a few children seem to be able to answer questions, particularly if they require higher-level thinking such as inferring a character's motivation or explaining why an event occurred. Often the children who participate the most in interactive read-alouds are those who have had many previous literacy experiences. Unfortunately, especially in programs serving high percentages of children at risk, few children may attempt to answer questions. It may be that children who are relatively passive during book interactions have had few opportunities to listen to books read aloud by adults who expect them to talk. They may need to have the teacher model how to think and talk about the text they have just heard or where to look for information in illustrations. Therefore, a first read of a story for children with few storybook experiences might include more teacher demonstrations of thinking aloud and fewer questions (McGee & Schickedanz,

2007). Teachers can read the same book more than one time so that each read encourages children to take a more active role in talking and later answering questions. A first read of a book might be considered a push-in read, because it is designed to show children that reading aloud involves thinking and talking, that words and their meanings are critical components of understanding and enjoying books, and that using the story problem provides glue to understanding the story as a whole. A first push-in read has five parts. Teachers:

- Give a book introduction that identifies the characters and something about the problem.
- Ask a few lower-level questions.
- Stop to think aloud and talk, making explicit for children the connections between events and revealing characters' thoughts and motivations (demonstrating higher-order thinking).
- Insert information about key vocabulary meanings without interrupting the flow of the story.
- Pose a higher-level question after reading the story that calls for extended explanations around the story as a whole (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; McGee, 2013).

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Giving Book Introductions

Book introductions for storybooks help children focus on the main character's problem. That is, the key to understanding a story is recognizing the problem, which is often not stated directly in the text. By late elementary age, children begin inferring the problem of a narrative immediately upon reading and use this problem as a guide for predicting and understanding events and making inferences about character traits and motivations (Van den Broek, 2001). In contrast, most preschoolers and kindergartners pay almost exclusive attention to characters and their actions without considering how the problem provides psychological motivation, tying the story together and laying the foundation for theme. Thus, a good book introduction prepares children to discover the problem and helps them follow the plan of action toward solving the problem.

In planning a book introduction, teachers read through the book and identify the main characters and their problems. For example, *Do Like a Duck Does!* (Hindley, 2002) is a story about a fox who pretends to be a duck in order to get closer to and capture ducklings to eat. His problem is that Mother Duck suspects he might not be a duck, carefully guards her ducklings, and brings him along on activities that ducks like to do but foxes do not. An introduction to *Do Like a Duck Does!* might be:

> "The main character in this story is a fox, and look, he is trying to act like a duck [using the front cover]. But he has a problem, look here [showing the back cover]. I don't think Mama Duck thinks the fox is a duck. Look, her face shows she is *suspicious* [dramatic demonstration of a suspicious scowl]. Let's find out why Fox acts like a duck and what Mama Duck does. She looks very *protective* of those ducklings. I don't think she will let anything happen to them."

Asking a Few Lower-Level Questions and Talking during Think-Alouds to Support Comprehension Processes

Teachers' comments during the first push-in read are designed to support children's use of higher-level thinking, in which they must integrate information from their previous knowledge with information from the text. Calling upon their prior knowledge allows readers to elaborate on or call to mind additional information about the content that might not be stated directly in the story but which they know from their own experiences. If a book describes a character riding in a car to school, children call to mind what they already know about going to school in a car. They can mentally picture getting in a car, buckling a seat belt, perhaps fighting with a sister or brother, and listening to the car radio. Calling to mind this mental information allows children to make inferences and judgments about characters and their actions. Teachers can demonstrate using prior knowledge, for example, when reading *Do Like a Duck Does!* They can stop and say, "That reminds me of I saw a family of ducks at a pond. One parent was in front of the babies and one in back. If anyone got near, the one in the back flapped her wings and charged toward the person. She looked pretty scary."

Being able to infer what characters are thinking and feeling is critical to understanding a story plot. Teachers can use think-aloud comments to make explicit some of the characters' thoughts and motivations. Teachers should select carefully critical events in the story to stop and talk about. For example, in *Do Like a Duck Does!*, the fox's motivation for acting like a duck is to get right up close to the ducklings, closer than he could if he were acting like a fox. He wants to get up close in order to make eating the ducklings easier. Mother Duck is very suspicious of the ducks and is naturally protective, but she does not send him away at first. Why does she not just send him on his way? Teachers and children must infer her motivation. She may realize she could scare the fox away for one day but he might keep coming back and eventually get a duckling. Thus, she has to scare him away for good. To begin the think-alouds, teachers might comment after reading the third double spread, "Look how mother is protective of her ducklings. They are all under her and she looks mad. I think the fox is trying to get near and I bet he wants to eat one of those little ducklings." After reading the next (fourth) double spread, teachers can comment, "Here is where he pretends to be a duck, but Mama duck notices he doesn't have a beak and his ears are wicked, that means up to no good. And his mouth is wicked, that means up to no good. He is trying to get real close. He is saying to himself, 'I'll just pretend to be a duck and soon I'll pounce on one of those yummy ducklings.' "

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However, during the first read, teachers should also engage children's interest by using some, but not many, lower-level questions interspersed through the reading. For example, at the third double spread when the fox first appears, before reading teachers might ask children to identify what animal he is. Later before reading the sixth double spread, the teacher might ask the children to identify what animals watch the ducks as they walk by the farmyard and then at the eighth double spread, to describe the fox (who is licking his chops and casting an evil eye). These questions keep children's attention focused on the action of the story.

Clarifying and Extending Vocabulary

Reading books aloud provides a significant source of new vocabulary for children. Children's books introduce children to more sophisticated words than they are likely to encounter in other language events (Cornell, Senechal, & Brodo, 1988; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000). Before reading a book aloud, teachers can select 8 to 10 vocabulary words or phrases to highlight during reading. The words and phrases selected should be those critical for understanding the story, those that children are likely to encounter in other books, or those that are more sophisticated labels than children usually hear for everyday objects and events (Beck et al., 2013). For example, a kindergarten teacher selected the words *suspicious, protect, waddle, creeping, beak, wicked, muck,* and *zip,* before reading *Do Like a Duck Does!* to her kindergartners. As she read the book, she read the words, turned to look at the children to give a few words of definition or explanation, and then turned back to the text and reread the sentence with the target word or phrase. She also acted out words and pointed to parts of the illustrations.

To exploit these vocabulary learning opportunities, teachers use specific techniques that make it more likely that children will notice the words and learn something about their meanings (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). Teachers can clarify or expand word and phrase meanings in one of four ways:

1. By inserting a short phrase or sentence that defines or explains a word as they read the text (e.g., by saying, "*Protect*. That means she won't let anyone hurt her ducklings. She *protects* them.")
2. By pointing to salient parts of the illustration that help clarify the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by pointing to the duck's *beak*).
3. By using dramatic gestures in acting out the meanings (e.g., by demonstrating *creeping* with her arms).
4. By using voice to demonstrate meaning (e.g., by reading with a suspicious voice, "Are you *sure* you're a duck?" and then adding, "I think she is *suspicious*.").

Vocabulary meanings that are offered during the first read provide information about meaning within the context of the story. For example, in *Do Like a Duck Does!*, *zip* is used to mean move very quickly rather than the more obvious action with a zipper.

Asking Higher-Level Questions after Reading

After reading the entire book, teachers ask a question that calls for children to use extended talk to explain story events. Such questions require that children recall specific events and make connections among them. For example, with *Do Like a Duck Does!*, the teacher might ask, "Why do you think Mama Duck took the fox and ducklings to the mud puddle?" The teacher could help children answer the question by turning to the mud puddle illustration and asking, "Do you think the fox likes eating bugs? How can you tell?" or "Why would mother duck make the fox eat bugs? Do you think she knows he doesn't like bugs?" These questions require extended talk about what happened and why. They are especially important to increasing children's vocabulary, syntax, and story comprehension.

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Second Read and Third Read: Pulling Out Ideas and Supporting Thinking

The second read of a narrative should occur within a day or two of the first read. The purpose of the second and third reads is to dramatically increase the amount of talk expected from children while reducing teacher talk. Instead of demonstrating how to think aloud, teachers ask higher-level questions that require children to call upon prior information and make inferences. To begin a second read, teachers ask children to remember the title, identify the main character, and describe the problem. Teachers read the book aloud, expanding the same vocabulary that was emphasized on the first read. At the same spots that teachers selected to stop and talk through a think-aloud on the first read, teachers in the second read stop and ask higher-level questions. For example, after reading the third double spread, teachers might ask, "What do you think fox is thinking?" and after the fourth double spread, "Why do you think Mama Duck is suspicious?" The after-reading question on the second read might remain the same or teachers might ask a different question (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Teachers might ask, "Why do you think Mama Duck took the fox to the pond?" or "Why did the fox slink away back home?" The second read is a time to extend children's understanding of the target vocabulary beyond the context of the story (McGinty & Justice, 2010). For example, teachers can reinforce the meaning of *zip* as moving fast, but also draw attention to *zip* your coat, when you move your zipper very fast.

The third read of a narrative should occur within a week or two of the second read, allowing for several days between readings. Now the teacher leads the children in recounting the story and may only read a few pages or sentences. To begin the teacher asks, "Who remembers the title and the problem of this story?" Several children should be encouraged to comment. Then the teacher opens to the first double spread of the book and asks, "What is happening here?" Teachers should ask children to clarify and expand their explanations and provide prompts for using the vocabulary that has been highlighted in the first two reads of the book.

Using Read-Alouds of Narratives to Develop Concept about Stories

Maximum comprehension depends on young children's understanding the structure of stories (Stevens, Van Meter, & Warcholak, 2010). Teachers can strengthen children's awareness of the components in stories by deliberately planning activities that draw attention to particular story concepts (Fitzgerald, 1989), including the following:

- A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Stories have characters.
- A story has a setting that tells where the story takes place.
- The main character has a problem that needs to be solved.
- The main character takes action to solve the problem. (Adapted from McGee & Richgels, 2000; McGee & Tompkins, 1981; Tompkins & McGee, 1989)

Teachers can introduce the concept of beginnings, middles, and ends of stories by rereading a favorite story, emphasizing each portion of the story as they read. Then

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they can invite children to retell what happened at each of those three parts of a story. Children can arrange in sequence pictures of story events (cut from an extra copy of the book) and identify which pictures go with the story's beginning, middle, and end. Teachers can introduce the idea of main characters and their problems by reading several books about favorite characters. Children love to read series books about the Berenstain Bears, Franklin, Arthur and D. W., and Henry and Mudge. In each book of a series, the familiar character faces a new problem. Many of the books of a series are set in a familiar story location, but each book also introduces a particular setting. Teachers can draw children's attention to story problems by distinguishing between stories in which characters have a problem with other characters and stories in which characters have a problem within themselves. For example, *Thunder Cake* (Polacco, 1990) tells the story of a girl who is frightened by a thunderstorm. Her grandma helps her conquer her fear by keeping her busy making a cake. In contrast, *Timothy Goes to School* (Wells, 1981) tells of the rivalry between two characters, Timothy and Claude. In this story, Timothy discovers a new best friend, Violet, who helps him ignore Claude's rudeness.

Interactive Read-Alouds of Informational Books

Teachers routinely select stories to read to young children, and most classroom libraries have fewer informational books than storybooks (Duke, 2000; Pentimonti, Zucker, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010). However, today many high-quality informational books are being published, even for very young children. These books have brief text and engaging illustrations and photographs on topics of interest to children. Some informational books are available in big-book format.

Reading informational books and sharing related experiences are powerful ways to introduce children, particularly children at risk for reading failure, to new concepts and vocabulary (Neuman & Dwyer, 2010; Neuman, Newman, & Dwyer, 2011). Unlike most middle-class children, many at-risk children have had little exposure to experiences that allow them to acquire knowledge or vocabulary about the scientific and technical world around them (Duke, 2000). Reading informational books seems to support especially rich discussion and thinking. Children naturally ask questions and seek information from these books. Their curiosity motivates listening to more difficult books. In fact, children and adults are likely to use higher-level talk when discussing the concepts in informational books (Price, Van Kleeck, & Huberty, 2009). Such talk involves children in:

- Drawing inferences about information not stated in the text or provided in the illustrations.
- Predicting what will happen next based on information provided in the text.
- Comparing and contrasting actions, objects, or characteristics.
- Summarizing, analyzing, or synthesizing information across several pages of text.
- Explaining events or actions, especially making cause-and-effect relationships explicit.
- Making connections among actions, events, or objects based on connections to life experiences (Zucker, Justice, Piasta, & Kaderavek, 2010).

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Informational books provide many opportunities to discuss the meanings of new vocabulary and to encourage children to use the new words as they talk about the book. Because informational books are full of technical vocabulary, effective teachers are careful to focus on a few words, the ones central to understanding the concepts presented in the book. During reading, teachers can stop to define a term briefly and then reinforce the meaning of the technical word by saying "This part of the text tells me the meaning of this word. Let me read it to you slowly."

Many informational books explain phenomena—why a volcano erupts or how a spider captures its prey. Embedded in such explanations are events linked by cause and effect. Effective teachers make explicit how the ideas in a text are linked together (Smolkin & Donovan, 2002), using words or phrases such as *as a result of, because of,* and *that causes.* With informational books, teachers may pause frequently to summarize, to link new information with information that has previously been read, and to connect information to children's experiences.

Children's knowledge and vocabulary can be further extended by reading several informational books on a common topic over the course of several days or even weeks (Heisey & Kucan, 2010). Reading several informational books on the same topic is easier now because of the many series of informational books published for young children. Often the books in a series are leveled: That is, the publisher identifies whether the book is intended for very young or slightly older children, based on the amount and complexity of its content. For example, teachers can find many different books about spiders. Some will be intended for very young children; they will include detailed photographs but very little exposition because the text is so short. Other books will be intended for older preschool and kindergarten children; they will include many photographs and some other visual aids such as labeled drawings and will have more text with a few technical words. Still other books will be intended for elementary-age children; they will include a variety of illustrations, including labeled drawings, graphs, charts, tables.

Teachers should read aloud books that are related to content standards in mathematics, social studies, and science. For example, many states have standards related to plants, living things, and history (Pentimonti et al., 2010). In addition to reading informational books about these topics, we recommend that teachers read narrative texts and even predictable or rhyming texts in order to extend children's engagement. For example, teachers can read the story *Bill and Pete* (dePaola, l996) to accompany informational books about crocodiles (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008). Or they can read *The Grouchy Ladybug* (Carle, 1996) or *Have You Seen Bugs?* (Oppenheim, 1996) during study of insects (Neuman & Roskos, 2012).

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Using Read-Alouds of Narrative and Informational Books to Teach Comprehension Strategies

Children who have had extensive experiences with books and older children can be introduced to using comprehension strategies they will later use as readers. The *Report of the National Reading Panel* (National Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) identified particular strategies to teach in order to improve children's comprehension. These include activating and connecting to prior

knowledge, visualizing, asking questions, making inferences, and retelling or summarizing. We suggest that during read-alouds, kindergarten teachers explicitly describe such strategies as the following (adapted from Gregory & Cahill, 2010, and Myers, 2005):

- Prior knowledge is all the information already inside your brain. You make connections when something in a book reminds you of something you know. You say, "I connect to that—."
- Visualization is when you make a movie in your brain which shows details, colors, smells, and feelings. You say, "I saw in my brain—."
- Questioning is what you do when sometimes you don't understand something in a book—you wonder why something happened or how it happened. You say, "I wonder—."
- Inferring is when you are able to think about something not in the story or illustrations. You say, "That character is thinking or feeling—" or "This event is connected to that event because—."
- Summarizing is telling the whole book in just a few words. You say, "This story is about ____________ [main character] who ____________ [problem] by ____________ [how problem is solved]", or "This book is about ______________ [topic], and it tells ____________, ____________, and ____________ [three important facts]."

Teachers demonstrate how to use one strategy with two or three books before teaching another strategy. When all the strategies are taught, children are invited to use them during pauses in read-alouds or at the end of book readings.

RETELLING AND DRAMA

After reading a storybook to children, teachers can engage them in retelling or dramatizing the story. Or they can help children to tell and then dramatize their own stories. These activities extend children's experiences with the content and words of stories and thus are among the most effective instructional techniques for increasing children's comprehension, vocabulary, and syntax (McGee, 2013).

Guided Story Retelling

Guided story retelling is a blend of retelling and drama (McGee, 2003) through the use of character props. Distributing character props among children assigns them a character.

Guiding Children during Whole-Class and Small-Group Retelling

The easiest books for guided story retelling activities are familiar folk and fairy tales. After children are very familiar with one of these stories, teachers guide them to recount the story, emphasizing what each character says. Then teachers give each child a

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character prop, such as a paper drawing of the character's face put on tag board. Several children are the same character. For example, the parts of the big billy goat, the middle billy goat, the little billy goat, and the troll are played by several children. Children can sit in a circle for this retelling activity as they will not be dramatizing or moving about. All children in the group participate in guided retelling. At first teachers do the narrating and, by holding up a copy of a particular character's prop, they prompt the children playing that character to say his or her dialogue. Individual children may be silent, say a few words softly, or confidently make up dialogue. All these responses are accepted, as guided story retelling is more like improvisation than saying memorized dramatic dialogue. Because guided retelling of a story is a short activity and is repeated over several days, children's confidence in speaking in character grows over time. On each subsequent day of guided retelling, children should enact different roles so that they become familiar with all of the story's dialogue. Repeated guided retelling is especially beneficial for ELL children. The props help them to remember when to speak and what to say; dialogue is more easily managed because it usually short and repeated; and saying the dialogue in groups provides a natural support for children whose language is not yet well developed. Teachers have found that having a parent or other volunteer read the story in the children's home language and help children retell the story in that language supports their later retelling in English (Roberts, 2008).

Guided story retelling's effectiveness is strengthened when it is accompanied by small-group practice. For example, there are many fine picture book versions of *The Three Little Pigs* and other favorite tales. Teachers might read different versions of the tale to different small groups of children, continuing to use the same props for retelling the story. When retelling in small groups, each child receives a copy of all the character props and practices telling the entire story saying all the character's dialogue. Teachers lead by providing the narration and prompting each characters' dialogue. The teacher's voice fades away as children take the lead in telling the entire story. At this point, teachers should place several copies of the small-group props in the Book Retelling Center or the Library Center.

Independent Book Retelling

Children should be encouraged to reuse small-group retelling props independently to construct new stories or add improvised events to favorite stories (Weisch, 2008). Helping children retell new stories that include the events from familiar stories with new twists and characters provides enormous challenges for language and comprehension (Meier, 2000). Children should also be encouraged to select and make their own retelling props. In order to select objects to represent characters, children must determine qualities that define a character (Rowe, 1998). Thus, allowing children to collect or construct their own props may be more intellectually challenging than providing them. Props include pictures cut from an extra copy of a book, small objects, items of clothing, puppets, and masks. Pictures can be hung on either a story clothesline or a storytelling stick. A story clothesline is constructed by tying a length of clothesline between two sturdy pieces of furniture, such as the teacher's chair and an easel. The best pictures to use on a story clothesline are approximately 6 inches square or larger. A storytelling stick

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is constructed from a yardstick with several small squares of self-stick Velcro attached to its length. Pictures used on the story stick need to be smaller, but large enough for children to see.

Small objects that represent the characters and important events are easy to obtain. For example, three small bears, three sizes of spoons, three sizes of paper cups (for chairs), and cloths of three different sizes (for beds) can be used to tell the tale of the three bears. *Mirandy and Brother Wind* (McKissack, 1988) is easily told using a jacket, several scarves, an old blouse, an apron, a small quilt, a pepper mill, and a tablecloth. Masks are also easily made book acting props.

Dramatizing Children's Original Stories: Story Playing

Another way to use storytelling in the classroom is to dramatize original stories that children compose. The *story playing* technique (Paley, 1990) has four elements: One child is invited to tell a story, and the teacher writes the child's story. The teacher reads the story aloud, and other children make comments, ask questions, or suggest elaborations. Finally, the child acts out the story, inviting other children to join in the story play to take on any needed roles. One way to organize story playing is to invite a few children to tell a story as they enter the classroom. As the teacher writes a child's story, he or she rereads what the child has said so that the child can see the connection between the talk and the written words. The teacher allows the storyteller to make corrections, additions, and deletions to the written story. The children know that this written copy of the story will be used for their later acting out of the story. During the school day, the storyteller may continue to elaborate on the story. As children become accustomed to the technique, they anticipate the end-of-the-school-day performance by including elements of the story in their dramatic play in play centers. Finally, at the end of the day, the children act out the story as the teacher reads the current written version of it. Some children are in the cast; they are chosen by the original storyteller. The other children are the audience; they are free to contribute to the ever-evolving story with comments and suggestions. In this way, story playing demonstrates revision, a process children will later use in their own writing. Its immediate importance for the preschool and kindergarten child, however, is that it is on-the-spot meaning making; it has immediate connections to the classroom lives of the students, which at this age should include many play opportunities.

PROJECTS, EXPERIMENTS, AND OTHER REAL EXPERIENCES: THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION IN LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Children learn about animals, space, oceans, and rocks by reading books about these topics. Of course, children also learn about these topics by watching television, visiting zoos, going to the beach, watching YouTube videos, and collecting rocks in nearby streams and rivers. However, as children get older, their learning about topics in science and social studies most often is through books, hands-on experiments, and participating in projects. These experiences are intended to build children's higher-level thinking

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skills. They are aimed at helping children pose and answer questions, make inferences about cause-and-effect relationships, and think critically. We have already described how reading informational books aloud is a critical component of a high-quality literacy program because it does support children's higher-level thinking. However, effective teachers extend and supplement informational book reading with carefully thought-out units of study that include experiments and projects.

Experiments are a natural part of discovery science and are particularly useful in helping children understand scientific concepts and develop process skills of investigation (Harlan & Rivkin, 2000). As a part of experiments, young children observe, classify, measure, predict, infer, and construct explanations. They use the basic steps of the scientific method, including becoming aware of a problem by asking, "What will happen if . . . ?," hypothesizing or predicting an answer or solution by stating "I think this will happen," finding out by trying out a prediction, and sharing the results with others by telling what happened. These steps are easy to implement, even with young preschool children. Imagine three children standing on a playground in the late afternoon. One child notices his shadow. The teacher urges the child to ask "What if?" questions: "What will my shadow look like if I put my hands over my head?" or "What will my shadow look like if my friend Eddy stands right next to me real close?" or "What will my shadow look like if I sit down?" Each of these questions can be accompanied by a prediction, for example, "I predict my shadow will get smaller if I sit down," and an experiment (actually sitting down to see what happens to the shadow). The results of these experiments can be communicated to all the children later in the day or the next day during circle time. As children share their discoveries and experiments, other children will become interested in pursuing experiments. Teachers should encourage all children to repeat experiments again and again as long as their interest and curiosity are aroused. Many resources, including the Internet, describe science experiments that are appropriate for young children.

The project approach, like discovery science, is another curriculum idea that engages children in posing and answering questions. Generally, projects are constructions created by children after extensive study and observation. For example, children have constructed a veterinary clinic, a dispatch office for school buses, a garden tiller, a bulldozer, an automobile, firefighting equipment, and a fire truck (Helm & Katz, 2001). Before construction, children visit actual sites or observe machines and tools in use. They draw pictures and diagrams, compose lists of materials that will be needed, and make plans for initial construction. During construction, children articulate problems that arise and brainstorm solutions. After constructions are complete, they communicate their project results by drawing and dictating or writing. Children dictate lists of things they learned, construct a big book with photographs and dictated captions, or draw the step-by-step sequence followed to produce their construction.

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SHARED WRITING AND WRITING WORKSHOP

Composing written messages is another classroom activity that provides many opportunities for children to extend their concepts and stretch vocabulary and syntax. Children

compose by participating in shared writing (in which the teacher has a directive role in both composing and writing) and during writing workshop or journal writing (in which the child composes and writes more independently).

Using Shared Writing

Shared writing is the joint creation of a text by teacher and students; the students provide many of the ideas, and the teacher does the actual writing, usually on a large piece of chart paper or marker board which all the children can see (Payne & Schulman, 1998). Shared writing occurs after an experience and extended conversation about the experience. Then teachers make explicit the purpose for the writing. For example, they might tell children that they are writing a summary of what happened on the trip to the orchard to help everyone always remember the great time they had on the trip. Then teachers ask children to help compose. For example, if they were writing a list of the kinds of apples the children saw on the trip, teachers would invite children to name types of apples. Or if they were composing a description of the activities they enjoyed at the orchard, children would be invited to remember what they did. Then, teachers write those contributions on a chart or large white board. The teacher and the children read and reread the resulting text several times together.

Shared writing experiences with younger preschoolers need not be as frequent as those with older preschoolers or kindergartners. Many teachers have found that with young children it is easier to compose lists than more complex text. After reading *Yuck Soup* (Cowley, 1989), one group of 3- and 4-year-olds dictated a list of the ingredients found in yuck soup. Another group of 4- and 5-year-olds compiled a list of animals found in *Over in the Meadow* (Wadsworth, 1992). After writing the lists during shared writing, the teachers hung the lists in the Art Center, and the children were invited to draw or paint pictures of the animals or yucky ingredients. Later, the shared writing charts, decorated by cutouts of children's art, were placed in the preschool hall where parents picked up their children, and children were reminded to read the charts to their parents.

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Making Shared Writing a Daily Activity

With kindergartners, shared writing should occur daily. Many teachers have used the *morning message* (see Payne & Schulman, 1998) to accomplish the daily writing goal. Morning message is sometimes called daily news or class message because it is usually written early in the morning, and topics that are written include the date, a greeting, upcoming school events, or anticipated activities. Many teachers have a rotation schedule so they select two or three children who dictate the morning message each day. Most teachers use one or two phrases that are repeated daily and then invite children to add additional sentences. Teachers help children remember the repeated message included in the news every day. Then they either help the selected child compose a sentence or guide children as they compose a message together. A typical morning message may include the following:

Good morning kindergartners!
Today is Tuesday.
Marie is going to her grandmother's house.
Joseí is going fishing with his uncle.

Another way to incorporate daily shared writing, one we actually recommend over daily message, is to compose texts for a class *memory book*. Teachers can take photographs of important classroom events or have children draw pictures—such as a picture of the sorting room children visited on their trip to the apple orchard. Then teachers can help children compose messages to accompany the photographs or pictures. For example, a teacher might help children compose the caption "Our apple orchard field trip." Then they would remind children of the purpose for writing: "That will help me remember that you drew these pictures after our field trip to the apple orchard. Oh, look, here's Mark's picture of the sorting room. Mark, what shall we write under your picture so people will remember the sorting room?" The children already know that the memory book displays their pictures of the apple orchard, and they may even recognize Mark's picture, but this teacher talk reinforces the record-keeping function of written language.

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Making Shared Writing Purposeful

Shared writing offers many opportunities to share with children the many kinds of printed texts we read and write. It allows teachers to make explicit the nature of language used in particular kinds of texts and their purpose. For example, want ads in the newspaper and birthday present wish lists serve the instrumental purpose of satisfying needs and wants. All children enjoy composing lists of hoped-for birthday presents, but they are also interested in how people use want ads: to obtain help for yard work or to locate a jersey worn by a favorite hockey player.

Teachers can seize opportunities to use shared writing to read and then compose texts that serve real purposes. For example, they can read aloud several of their own e-mails to relatives and then help children compose an e-mail to a classmate who has moved away or to a distant grandparent. When a child is absent from school, teachers could have on hand several get-well cards to read as models. Then they can help children compose their own card. Teachers can extend experiences with get-well cards by placing them in the Writing Center along with specially cut paper and envelopes for children's pretend writing.

Teachers can introduce children to yard-sale signs, party invitations, grocery lists, telephone books, maps, and directions in order to enrich play in the Home Living Center. They bring in examples they have gathered from their homes or found in their neighborhoods, share them with children, and then place them in the center. Each of these print items can become a shared writing activity or an activity for the Writing Center.

Teachers can capitalize on opportunities to demonstrate using writing purposefully as they arise during classroom activities. When children have completed an especially complicated structure from blocks, teachers may invite them to dictate a DO NOT DISTURB

sign. Later, the teacher would read the sign to the children and talk about what it means. Leaving the sign and block construction in place for a day or two emphasizes its regulatory purpose. Later, teachers can photograph the children, their block construction, and the sign and add it to the class memory book, using this as still another opportunity for shared writing.

Using Shared Writing to Display Information

Shared writing can be used to collect and display information gathered during a social studies or science unit. During a unit on plants, children can dictate for a whole-class science journal their daily observations of a sweet potato's growth in a glass jar. Later, teachers can help children compose a list of things they have learned about plants. *Venn diagrams* (two circles drawn so that they overlap) or *comparison charts* can be used to compare information about similar objects or events. For example, teachers can help children compare a maple leaf to an oak leaf and then use the information from their discussion to compose a Venn diagram.

Another way to use shared writing to display information is by constructing surveys. Classroom events suggest many topics for surveys, which can be answered with the words *yes* or *no* or by having children write their signatures under columns labeled "Yes" and "No." A child's recent trip inspired the survey "Have you been to Disney World?" A child who came to school one day with a cast over a broken bone helped to construct the survey "Have you ever had a cast?" A rainy day sparked the survey "Did you wear boots today?" The answers to even simple questions such as "Do you like red?" provide many opportunities for displaying information. Once a survey is completed, teachers can help children compose summary statements such as "Three children wore boots today. Twelve children did not." After learning how to take surveys, many children enjoy creating their own during center time. To encourage survey taking, teachers can stock a Writing Center with a few clipboards and pencils.

Journal Writing and Writing Workshop

While shared writing involves more teacher direction (selecting the topic of the writing and the genre—a list, recipe, description, want ad, etc.—and writing the message), journal writing or writing during writing workshop allows children to decide topics and genre, and compose and write their message more independently.

Journal Writing, Sharing, and Conferencing in Preschool

Writing is usually a daily occurrence in preschool, at least for some children, as they pretend to write in the Home Living Center, Dramatic Play Center, or Writing Center. That is, many children effortlessly incorporate writing into their pretend dramatic play or attempt writing at the Writing Center, especially when teachers or assistants model writing and invite children to write with them. Teachers also encourage children to write by asking them to place their writing in a basket or special chair and after center time allow each child to talk about his or her writing. Other teachers encourage writing

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by displaying many examples of children's writing around the classroom or by inviting children to hang their own writing where they choose.

However, teachers who notice that many of their children do not choose to write may schedule a separate daily writing time of 15 to 20 minutes. They might call this time journal writing or writing workshop. In elementary school, writing workshop includes short mini-lessons, free writing when children write independently, writing conferences in which children confer together and with their teacher about their writing, and sharing, when children read their writing to the other children and solicit comments and feedback. In preschool and kindergarten, the writing workshop can be modified to meet the developmental needs of the writers in the classroom and across the school year.

In the beginning of the year, preschoolers and kindergartners compose in journals made of several pages of paper stapled together. The paper can be blank or have the bottom half lined. Teachers can demonstrate how to draw a picture and then write a word, a phrase, or a sentence to label the picture. Then they can model how to compose by merely speaking, without writing; by using scribble writing; by making strings of letters; or by inventing spellings. Teachers model invented spelling by saying words slowly, listening for sounds, and then writing letters that represent those sounds. As children finish their drawing and writing, they can come to the teacher or assistant and dictate their story for the teacher or assistant to write quickly at the bottom of the page. Teachers help children reread their stories, not worrying if the words are exactly the same as the dictation. At the end of writing time, children can be invited to sit in a special chair to read their story and to walk slowly around the circle to show the illustration to the other children (King, 2012). As children walk around, other children are allowed to comment or ask questions.

Meanwhile, as journal writing is getting under way, teachers can prepare children for writing longer texts—writing stories or other informational texts that extend across six to eight pages and take more than one day to compose (Ray & Glover, 2008). Teachers can use one of their read-aloud times to focus on reading for becoming a writer. That is, during read-aloud time, teachers comment on and share with children how authors and illustrators find topics to write about, how they extend their ideas across several pages, and how they select words for the text and images for the illustrations. For example, teachers can point out that picture books:

- Contain words and illustrations.
- Have words and illustrations that change from page to page.
- Are about something(they stick to a topic and one or two characters).
- Are composed of carefully selected words and images (Ray & Glover, 2008, p. 132).

Teachers can help children think about topics that authors choose to write about. Teachers read aloud books that demonstrate how authors decide what to write about. Authors write about:

- A place they like.
- An activity they like to do or want to remember.

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- Their families or friends.
- How they are feeling.
- How to do something.
- A topic that interests them.

Children can also be encourage to write about topics related to their own experiences. They can write about an art project they completed, a pretend episode from the Dramatic Play Center, a game they played outside, or an object that the teacher has brought in to share. Children can also write about content topics they are studying, such as living things, plants, or history.

Finally, picture books can be read aloud to share with children interesting language, different font sizes and shapes, or dialogue. Teachers can point out illustrators' use of color, perspective, borders, and detail.

When children have been taught a little about picture books and how they work, teachers can replace journals in which they are expected to write a page a day with empty books of six to eight pages in which they are expected to write an extended story with an illustration and text on each page (of course, many children will continue to rely on dictation to create their written texts).

Conferences with advanced preschoolers and kindergartners are opportunities to promote children's understanding of invented spellings and to provide feedback about the quality of children's compositions. Some teachers prefer at first to provide daily topics for writing, but later to allow children to select their own topics (Bergen, 2008). Teachers have found that conferences with one or two children in which they provide feedback at children's levels of need about both spelling and composition are more effective than the whole-class mini-lessons that typically occur in elementary school. Most teachers have found they can confer with each child about once a week

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AN EXEMPLARY CLASSROOM IN ACTION

As an example of how teachers can make information, understanding, and knowledge the center of their preschool and kindergarten program, we describe how a prekindergarten teacher, Ms. Simpson (introduced in Chapter 2), used a theme to provide a rich informational background in which she embedded a wide variety of literacy, language, and math activities. She wanted to teach considerably more than the narrow range of skills that are targeted in many packaged literacy programs. She wanted to develop themes that would be more interesting to the children and provide more opportunities for investigation. One afternoon an idea for a new theme occurred to her while she supervised her children as they were boarding the school buses and being picked up by parents for their trips home from school. She decided to plan a theme around automobiles—the most frequent form of personal transportation. In the past she had used focused on all forms of transportation—by land, water, and air. However, she realized that the theme of automobiles was far more closely related to the children's lives and potentially offered more opportunities for investigation than the more general theme of transportation. She knew she could integrate this theme with social studies standards around history and economics.

Developing the Theme

To prepare for the theme, Ms. Simpson researched automobiles using the Internet. She found information about the history and significance of the Model T and other models of automobiles, including the 1949 Ford Coupe and the Mustang. She located information on current makes and models of automobiles, and she took a virtual tour of the Henry Ford and Rolls Royce Museums and viewed photographs of old cars rebuilt by collectors. She found many Internet sites devoted to restoring antique cars and to car clubs. As she studied the information on these Internet sites, Ms. Simpson became keenly aware of how the automobile had changed not only the way goods are produced and sold, but also the very nature of society. However, she realized many of these abstract ideas were not appropriate for her young children. She did think that her children would be highly motivated by the topic and could learn a great deal about history as a part of this theme.

Ms. Simpson visited the local library to locate children's books related to automobiles, using keyword searches. She also used online bookstores to locate more resources for the theme. By using the library, buying a few new books, and using a few books from her previous transportation theme, Ms. Simpson found nearly 25 books she could use for the automobile theme (see the list of books as part of Ms. Simpson's planning web in Figure 3.2). She quickly read the books, jotting down the major ideas presented in each. She realized that none of the books she had selected for the theme came in big-book format. However, she noted that several used rhyming phrases. She decided to copy portions of *Duck in the Truck* (Alborough, 2001) and *Pigs in the Mud in the Middle of the Rud* (Plourde, 1997) on large charts to use for shared reading.

After reading all the books she had selected for the unit and browsing the Internet sites, Ms. Simpson thought about the major concepts and vocabulary she might help her children learn. She decided that several major ideas were appropriate learning outcomes for 5- and 6-year-olds. They could learn that there are many makes (manufacturers) and models of automobiles; automobiles have many parts—some designed for safety and some mechanical; automobiles have changed over time; automobiles influence the way we live; automobiles are manufactured from raw materials such as steel, sold at businesses called car dealerships, bought by families, and repaired at service stations; and families have to balance their needs with their wants when they purchase an automobile.

Planning Theme Activities

Now Ms. Simpson decided she would need to gather old family photographs from her family that featured her family's car; pictures from the Internet on the history of the Ford Model T, 1949 Coupe, and Mustang; and copies of brochures from several car dealers. She knew her children could not go on long field trips, so she decided she would visit the nearby Mercedes manufacturing plant and take photographs of the assembly line in order to take her children on a virtual tour. She gathered old photographs of automobiles from the Internet and asked her father for back issues of *Motor Trend* magazine. Finally, she gathered miniature cars for the Block Center. She would use these artifacts, photographs, and toys to initiate conversations with her children about their knowledge of automobiles and to develop new concepts about the makes, models, and parts of

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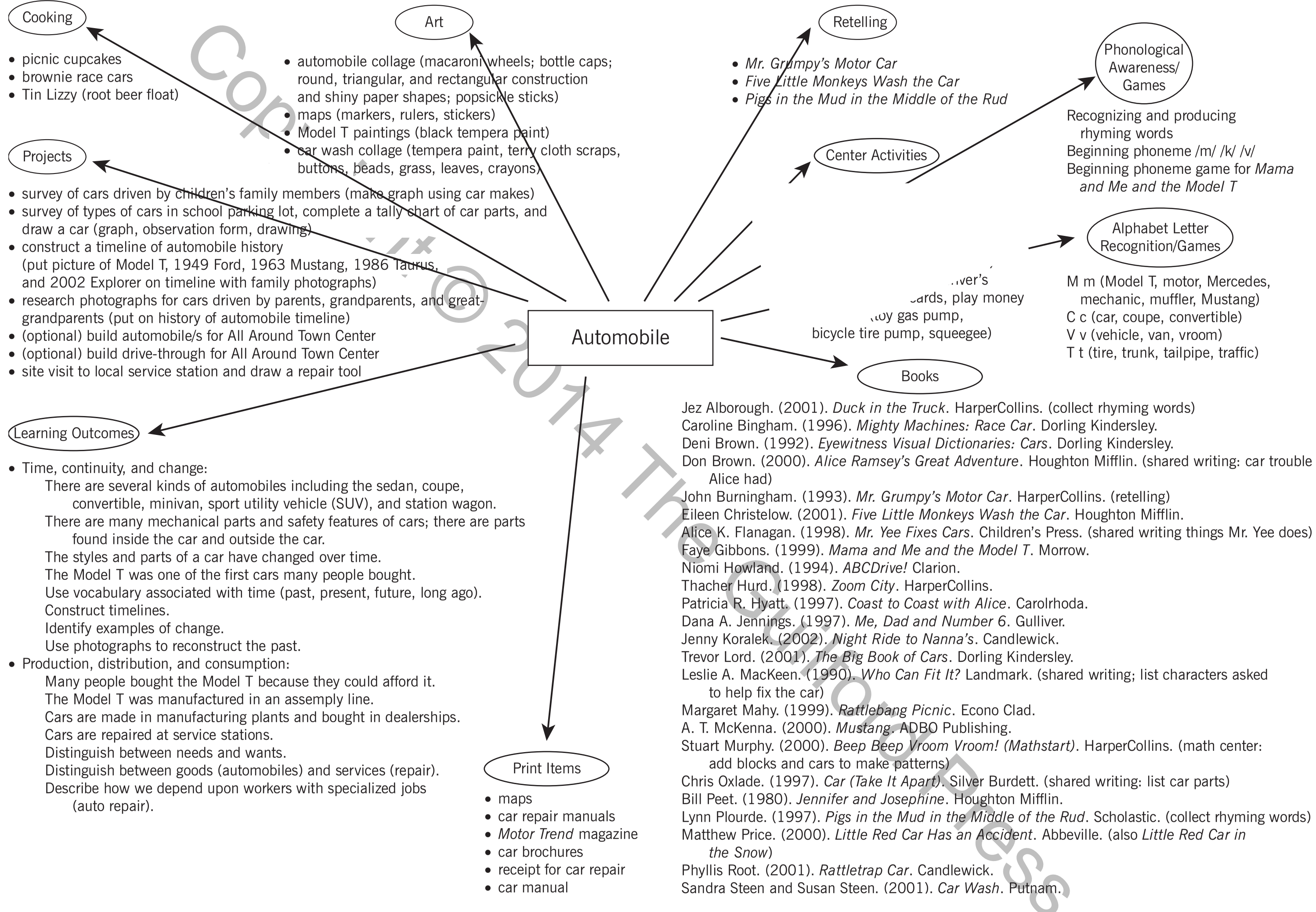

FIGURE 3.2. Automobile theme planning web.

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automobiles. These resources would also provide a visual introduction to the manufacturing of automobiles and to changes in automobiles over time.

Then she brainstormed car-related cooking and art activities and thought about projects that children could do to collect data for graphs, charts, and other displays about cars. She planned a special dramatic play theme center, All Around Town, in which children could pretend to wash cars, go on car trips, order fast food at a drive-through, and buy gas or get a car fixed at the gas station. She thought about the props she would need to gather for the All Around Town center. She selected three books that would be appropriate for retelling and considered props to use in this activity.

Involving Parents and the Community

All preschool classrooms in Ms. Simpson's building host parent meetings once a month. She decided to write a letter to parents about the automobile theme prior to the upcoming meeting. She wanted parents who owned cars to have the option of visiting school with their cars. She stressed that having a variety of cars for children to explore would be especially fun, but she was careful not to convey an assumption of car ownership or an expectation that all children's families would visit the school with their cars. She also invited parents to bring in car repair tools and old car parts. Because two of her children spoke Spanish at home, Ms. Simpson asked the elementary home–school liaison to write the letter in Spanish for those parents. At the parent meeting she described the theme and talked about ways parents could support it at home, including ways that did not depend on owning a car, for example, by making lists of cars observed in the neighborhood. She stressed the importance of using lots of vocabulary words related to cars. The parents brainstormed a list of over 50 words related to automobiles. Ms. Simpson shared with parents the importance of using these words in their everyday conversations with children. As they left the meeting several parents made commitments to bring their cars to school.

Ms. Simpson also visited a service station that was located near the school to find out whether the children could come to observe a car being repaired. She convinced the mechanic (who had worked on her previous car) that her children would like to see him roll under a car, change the oil, and fix a flat tire. She discussed safety issues and set the day and time for the visit.

Teaching the Automobile Theme

Ms. Simpson was ready to make weekly plans for teaching the automobile theme. In her weekly plan, Ms Simpson listed books for read-alouds, other print items that could be read for information or introduced for center activities, resources to use in theme activities, books for retelling or drama, art and cooking activities, music, and the text used for shared reading.

Introducing the Theme

Ms. Simpson began her theme by introducing the children to the miniature cars she brought for the Block Center. The children talked about their toy cars at home, their

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families' cars, and favorite cars. She discussed the word *automobile*, wrote it on a strip of poster paper, and placed it in the Writing Center. She also showed children the copies of *Motor Trend* magazine she had found and placed some of these in the Writing Center, some in the Art Center, and some in the Home Living Center. She encouraged children to write about or draw automobiles during center time that day.

Finally, Ms. Simpson read *Beep Beep, Vroom Vroom!* (Murphy, 2000) aloud. In this story a little sister tries three times to arrange her big brother's miniature cars in the same pattern that her brother uses. As she read, Ms. Simpson commented on the story, and many children talked about their miniature cars, brother–sister relationships, and hating to be "too little" to play with good toys. Ms. Simpson pointed out the pattern of the colors of cars lined up on one page of the story. She wrote the color words on a large sheet of chart paper in the pattern illustrated in the book. She named each letter of a color word as she wrote it, then read the word and invited children to read the words. Ms. Simpson reread the chart several times, inviting the children to join her. Then the children were invited up to the chart to identify an alphabet letter or a word they would like to write on the shared writing chart. Ms. Simpson hung the chart in the Writing Center and reminded the children that they could write more letters or words on the chart during center time. She encouraged children to bring their miniature cars to school to use in the Block Center. She suggested visiting this center to make more patterns. She reminded children they could make patterns with the paper, blocks, or any other manipulatives in that center. She also taught many explicit math lessons on making patterns.

Theme Activities

Ms. Simpson planned to read portions of the new car brochures the next day. This would make a good transition between toy cars and real automobiles. It would introduce children to the concept of the difference between make and model of cars and start a discussion about the parts of cars. Later in the week she would show a picture of herself and her current car and three pictures she had found of cars her mother, father, and grandfather had previously owned. One of these photographs showed her grandfather's 1949 Ford. This would begin the study of automobile history and serve as a springboard into one of the projects: finding photographs that included cars, including family photos and photos from magazines. The children used Ms. Simpson's and their own photographs during many writing workshop activities. They wrote ads for cars, stories about riding in cars, and information about car parts and their purpose during shared writing (and Ms. Simpson encouraged them to use these topics during journal writing).

As the theme unfolded, Ms. Simpson's children acquired much information about automobiles and their history. They learned the difference between the make of a car and model. In one shared writing experience, children listed the three most popular makes of cars. Children also collected information about the parts of cars. Figure 3.3 presents Jamaica's tally of car parts she found when she observed and drew a picture of Ms. Simpson's car in the parking lot (adapted from Helm & Katz, 2001). They learned vocabulary words such as *vehicle, automobile, Tin Lizzy, Model T, sedan, coupe, convertible,*

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FIGURE 3.3. Jamaica's tally of car parts.

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SUV, bumper, windshield, wipers, glove box, hood, tailpipe, muffler, chrome, steering wheel, dashboard, gearshift, upholstery, tachometer, odometer, oil gauge, gasoline, highway, overpass, tunnel, intersection, pedestrian, traffic, passenger, license tag, Ford, Chevrolet, Toyota, BMW, Mercedes, Mustang, Corvette, Viper, motor, manufacturer, assembly line, dealership, service station, repair, wrench, mechanic, motorcar, running boards, starter, and *pedal*. They collected family photographs showing cars from the past and used them along with pictures they found on the Internet to construct a 100-year timeline from 1902 to 2002. Several children built three automobiles for the All Around Town Dramatic Play Center out of cardboard boxes and other household items.

The children also engaged in many reading and writing activities as part of the theme. Ms. Simpson read several times *Mr. Gumpy's Motor Car* (Burningham, 1993) and *Pigs in the Mud in the Middle of the Rud* (Plourde, 1997). Then she prepared laminated construction paper animals and characters for retelling the stories. All of the children visited the Book Center and retold these stories numerous times. They constructed street signs for roadways that they built in the Block Center. They listened to and discussed an alphabet book about cars, stories that took place in cars, fictionalized

accounts of real automobile adventures, and informational books about cars. As part of these book experiences, children talked about automobiles from the past and the stereotype of girls not being allowed to drive cars. They recalled rhyming words they heard in *Duck in the Truck* (Alborough, 2001) and then played rhyming word games with picture cards.

During the theme, Ms. Simpson introduced four phonemes (/m/, /v/, /k/, and /t/) by modeling and talking about how to articulate each phoneme. Children practiced articulating a phoneme and deciding whether a spoken word had that phoneme. They matched pictures that had the target phoneme and sorted pictures according to beginning phonemes. They played a game based on *Mama and Me and the Model T* (Gibbons, 1999) in which children drove a Model T around the game board by matching pictures with the same beginning phoneme. Some children cut pictures of objects and made phoneme charts as part of a center activity. Ms. Simpson modeled writing both the upper- and lowercase alphabet letters for *M, V, K, and T* on Alphabet Write Ons, and all the children wrote dozens of alphabet letters on the Write Ons during center activities. The children wrote checks for food (see Figure 3.4), ordered food at a pretend drive-through (a puppet stage converted to a "Burger Barn"), and wrote speeding tickets. They read maps as they played in the All Around Town dramatic play center and made maps in the Art Center.

Reflecting on the Success of the Theme

Near the end of the theme, the reading specialist visited the classroom and noticed that many children had made progress in recognizing alphabet letters and being able to segment beginning sounds both in instructional activities and when they invented spellings. Several children pretended to read books to themselves in the Book Center, often choosing books with rhyming words. Most children pretended to write as they played in the Dramatic Play Center and composed stories and information books during writing workshop. They were talking more during book reading and other media-sharing experiences, often making elaborated comments using the sophisticated vocabulary they had been exposed to during the theme. The children's parents commented on how much the children talked about cars as they traveled.

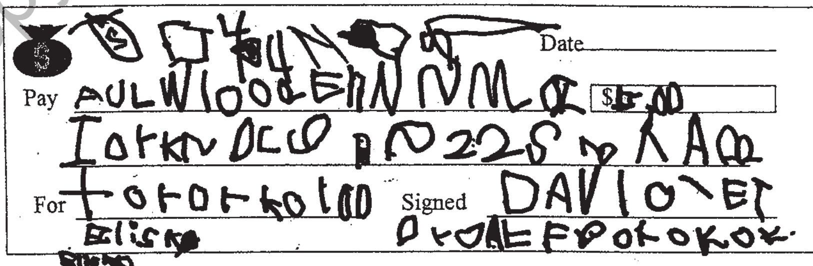

FIGURE 3.4. Check for a drive-through order.

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we discussed the critical importance of keeping knowledge acquisition at the forefront of curriculum development for exemplary prevention programs. Children learn literacy in the service of gaining new knowledge and understanding. We described several methods of reading aloud to children depending on children's experience listening to and talking about books at higher levels of comprehension. For example, children with fewer book experiences and young children may need a deliberate approach to reading narratives that includes three reads of the same book. The first read, a push-in read, consists mainly of teacher-demonstrated talk. The teacher begins with a book introduction that identifies the main character and problem. The teacher also emphasizes and extends the meaning of 8 to 10 vocabulary words while maintaining the flow of the story. After reading, children are challenged to answer a high-level question that requires extended explanation. The second and third readings, pull-out reads, engage children in answering questions and recounting on their own the events of a story. Information books should also be read aloud, especially in themed units where teachers share parts of many different books about the same concepts. Vocabulary learning should be tied to the concepts being learned. Children with more book experiences and older children can benefit from narrative and informational book read-alouds that focus on comprehension strategies such as retelling or summarizing, clarifying vocabulary, asking questions, and visualizing. Understanding of books read aloud is extended by guided drama and retelling activities in whole-class, small-group, and independent contexts. Concepts are extended through projects and experiments, shared writing, and journal or book writing. Teachers can demonstrate the variety of purposes for writing by demonstrating writing get-well cards, surveys, and Venn diagrams. Through all these activities, teachers create daily opportunities to extend children's concepts, vocabulary, and understandings of complex picture books and other media and content topics. Classrooms with rich experiences associated with in-depth study of topics provide for assessing individual children and grouping them to provide differentiated instruction that accelerates learning.

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