



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Choosing the Right Text

Nell K. Duke, Ed.D. • November 2010

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension  
Practice: Teach Comprehension Strategies

### Highlights

- Dr. Nell Duke, panel member of the IES practice guide, discusses key aspects of the recommendation to select appropriate text for reading instruction.
- Duke describes several dimensions of effective text selection, such as difficulty level, interest, and instructional purpose. She also explains how this recommendation relates to all the other recommendations in the practice guide.

### About the Interviewee

Nell K. Duke, Ed.D., is professor of teacher education and educational psychology and co-director of the Literacy Achievement Research Center (LARC) at Michigan State University. Dr. Duke's work focuses on early literacy development and instruction, particularly among children living in poverty. She has received several awards for her research, including the National Reading Conference Early Career Achievement Award and the American Educational Research Association Early Career Award. She is co-author of numerous books, including *Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades: Research-Based Practices* and *Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best*

*Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to Five.*

## Full Transcript

My name is Nell Duke. I am a professor of teacher education and educational psychology at Michigan State University. I also co-direct a research center here called the Literacy Achievement Research Center.

We really think of reading comprehension in a triangle with three different pieces. So one is the activity that is involved in the reading comprehension, the context around which someone is reading. The second is the reader, all the different characteristics that the reader brings, the knowledge the reader brings to the reading comprehension process. But the third part of that triangle is the text. The text is really important in shaping reading comprehension processes and in shaping reading comprehension development.

The recommendation to select text that will support reading comprehension has several different facets to it. One is that we really want teachers to select a variety of genres of text, so a variety of types of text, both informational text and also literary text. Another piece of it is that we want the teachers to think about selecting texts that are appropriate levels of difficulty for students. And by level of difficulty, we're not just talking about the word reading demands of the text, that is, how hard the words are for a student to read, but also the comprehension demands of the text—how hard is it to understand this text. These two things are not always aligned, so sometimes we have students who are very good at word reading but have difficulty comprehending even fairly simple texts. We also have students who can comprehend fairly sophisticated texts but are still struggling with that word reading dimension.

A third piece of our recommendation is that we really want teachers to select texts that are going to support their instructional goals. For example, if teachers are teaching compare/contrast text structure, we want them to, at least early on, select texts for teaching that have a very clear, very obvious compare/contrast text structure to them.

One study that really stands out as really underscoring how important text selection is is a study by Jim Hoffman and his colleagues. What they found was that the characteristics of the texts that were in classrooms, particularly their quality, their sheer quantity, and also the types of texts in classrooms, was related to students' reading comprehension growth. So teachers who had greater quality, greater quantity, and a greater range of types of text in their classrooms did actually have kids who grew more in their reading comprehension in those primary grade years.

When a teacher's selecting a text for reading comprehension lessons, there are several different things she needs to think about. First thing she needs to think about is her readers. So she wants to select a text that is not going to be too difficult for them to read or comprehend but is going to give them a little bit of challenge, because that little bit of challenge is what's going to encourage them to work hard in their comprehension, apply their strategies, and so on. So first thing she wants to do is match her readers to the

level of the text. She also wants to think about her readers in terms of interest or engagement. If she can find texts that are more interesting to her students, that's clearly going to make reading comprehension instruction go more smoothly.

She also wants to think about her curriculum. So for example, if the whole week she has been doing all of her read-alouds and all of her small-group reading instruction with literary texts, like stories, then we want her to think about, "Today, I am going to use some informational text. I am going to bring in some expository text for my students to read today, so that I can balance out my curriculum calls for both informational and narrative. I want to make sure I balance that out."

Another thing we want her to think about is her instructional goals for that lesson: "What am I trying to teach here, and what is going to facilitate that best?" For example, when you are first teaching summarizing with young children, it works really well to use texts that even already have a summary in them, for example, an informational text that ends with a nice concluding paragraph. Or it works very well to use stories that have a fairly simple structure, so that you can fairly quickly summarize that. And at first, that really helps students to develop that early summarizing skill. And then, of course, over time you are going to want to use more sophisticated texts that are more challenging for kids to summarize.

The recommendation to select texts carefully for reading comprehension instruction, this is an important recommendation to consider for all the other recommendations within the practice guide, because every other recommendation is implemented better when we use appropriate text. For example, it's easier to create engaging environments for students when we select texts that are very engaging. It's easier to teach text structure when we select texts that really clearly depict the text structure we're teaching. Similarly, for comprehension strategy instruction, we really want to select a text for teaching that strategy where using that strategy is going to really help you understand the text.

And sometimes I see teachers, particularly newer teachers, make missteps here. For example, I once had a pre-service teacher who wanted to teach the prediction strategy, the strategy of predicting, using *The Cat in the Hat*. This is a big mistake, right? Because most students are very familiar with *The Cat in the Hat* story, and so they're not going to really exercise their prediction muscles when they already know what happens. So we really want to select, in the case of predicting, a text where there are many possible things that could happen, where the text gives some clues as to what could happen, and where a good reader would be really mining those clues to figure out what's going to happen next.

So it's all about picking the kind of text that's going to be the best vehicle really for your comprehension instruction.

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