Processing Behaviors:
Early Readers and Nonfiction Text

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Note: All names are pseudonyms.

Conner: Hey, these are like science books – cool!
Sam: I really like castles! What would it be like to live in one?
Emily: I want to read cats and dogs, now!

Comments like these made by my Reading Recovery students about nonfiction caused me to question the assumption that narrative genres should be the primary vehicle for teaching young children how to read (Adams, 1990; Egan, 1988; Wells, 1986).

I began selecting more nonfiction books from my predominantly narrative book collection as reading material for all of my Reading Recovery students. I observed

- Conner reading nonfiction books more enthusiastically than narrative stories;
- Sam reading nonfiction fluently and in phrases; narrative structures sounded choppy; and
- Emily reading nonfiction books, as her first choice, during familiar reading.

I was curious and wanted to know if early readers could read nonfiction as efficiently and effectively as they read narrative texts. Could early readers learn about print and learn from print while reading nonfiction? To discover an answer I asked many questions, including how do early readers process information when reading nonfiction text?1

Theoretical Framework

Early readers and nonfiction texts
Young children demonstrate the ability to speak, read, and write in a variety of genres that continues to develop during their primary years in school (Donovan, 2001; Kamberelis, 1999; Zecker, 1996). Experience with informational texts enhances children’s ability to use the variety of textual structures presented therein and facilitates understanding and comprehension while reading that genre (Chapman, 1994; Kamberelis; Pappas, 1991, 1993; Zecker).

Several researchers support the need to expand rather than shift the repertoire of genres young readers are exposed to, creating a better balance between narrative and informational materials. Why?

- Informational texts may be the “catalyst” launching literacy development for other students (Caswell & Duke, 1998).
- As children progress through school, the amounts of informational texts they are expected to read and write increases.

Yet, the number of narrative texts made available to students typically outweighs informational genres, and children’s reading selections reflect this availability (Donovan et al., 2000).

Despite suggestions to increase children’s exposure to expository text, the emphasis on narrative still prevails (Duke, 1999), denying children a “full access to literacy” (Pappas, 1993). This denial may actually delay the reading development of children who prefer other genres (Donovan & Smolkin, 2002; Duke) or who are exposed to informational genres in their homes and communities (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Instructional emphasis on narrative texts places children at a disadvantage by inadequately preparing them to effectively read and write a genre that they will be expected to use throughout a lifetime. These points may be especially pertinent for our Reading Recovery students: some

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1This was one of the questions addressed in an unpublished doctoral dissertation. For additional details and discussion, see Eure, N. (2004). Observations and conversations: Constructing a grounded theory of early readers and nonfiction text. Reading Education. Denton: Texas Woman’s University.
may actually prefer or be more familiar with informational genres, and all of our students will need to use these genres throughout their lives.

**Reading processes**

Processing refers to the way a reader uses and relates information accessed from a variety of sources, both within and outside of the text, to understand the message (Clay, 1991; Goodman, 1994). Describing the observed processing behaviors of children reading nonfiction provides a “comprehensible” description about what they know and what they need to know to read nonfiction texts proficiently. Three key terms used in this study describe processing: *strategic processing*, *parallel processing*, and *successive processing* (Clay, 2001).

Some terms used to represent strategic processing are self-monitoring, searching, and self-correction (Clay, 2005). Self-monitoring means checking on yourself when reading. A child who is reading accurately is self-monitoring. Monitoring may be observed when a child stops or gives signs of uncertainty. Searching is the gathering of information, used for the first attempt to read, or looking for more information with successive attempts to solve and/or self-correct. Self-correction refers to the rejection of an error response; it involves monitoring, searching, and correcting.

Parallel and successive processing help describe how children are self-monitoring, self-correcting, and searching. Parallel processing signifies the simultaneous use of multiple knowledge sources that is characteristic of a “highly interactive parallel processing system” (Rumelhart, 1994, p. 889). According to Clay (2001), parallel processing is evidenced by children’s more rapid decision making. Furthermore, parallel processing seems to occur when children make very few overt attempts at problem solving, with substitutions more closely matching the text. “The learner’s active brain is rapidly cross-relating all of this information and making decisions about it.” (Clay, 2005).

When children read nonfiction smoothly with very little attention directed to solving words, close attention to how they are simultaneously using knowledge sources reveals decision-making processes.

**Text:** Mosquitoes do not look after their eggs.

**Child:** Mosquitoes do not look after they eggs.

In this example, Erica accessed information at the letter, letter-cluster, and word levels. The substitution error was also meaningful up to the point of error. She used several knowledge sources simultaneously in the substitution. Parallel processing indicates that attention is covertly and quickly directed toward solving words; reading proceeds smoothly, without apparent effort.

Early readers also apply successive processing. Instead of accessing or using information from several sources at once, they sometimes attend to one piece of information at a time in a series of actions (Clay, 2001). Erica made successive attempts when trying to solve *most*.

**Text:** Most snakes look after their eggs.

**Child:** Mommy, m-ost, must snakes look after their eggs.

Initially she substituted *mommy/most*. When word-level knowledge did not match, she attempted a sound analysis at the letter and letter-cluster levels. Her final substitution indicates that Erica used knowledge sources at the feature, letter, letter-cluster and word levels. The substitution was also grammatical and meaningful. Erica made successive attempts as she tried to solve *most*.

Parallel and successive processing reflect the direction of attention toward the act of reading a text. Knowledge sources are used simultaneously in parallel processing and separately with a series of actions in successive processing. This study focused on exploring evidence of readers’ parallel and successive processing to examine how children use sources of information while reading nonfiction text.

**Methodology**

Qualitative research is exploratory research (Creswell, 1994) designed to promote understanding of a process or experience through inductive forms of inquiry (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative research design was used to describe how early readers process information in nonfiction texts. The methods employed were multi-layered and complex, resulting in the construction of a grounded theory, or a theoretical explanatory scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of this article is to describe early readers’ processing of nonfiction text. Because of the in-depth nature of the methodology and space limitations, only portions of the study illustrating the complexity of children’s oral reading of nonfiction text are described.

**Early readers**

The small, purposive sample consisted of five kindergarten children displaying the behaviors characteristic of
early readers (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), similar to that of many of our Reading Recovery students, which include

- beginning to rely more on the text and less on the illustrations for support;
- fluency with several high-frequency words;
- control of beginning literacy behaviors such as directionality and word-to-word match;
- developing a network of strategies such as monitoring, searching, cross-checking (comparing one source of information with another), and self-correcting to facilitate effective reading;
- developing the ability to use reading strategies with more than one source of information; and
- ability to read “appropriately selected texts independently” (p. 177) following an introduction by the teacher.

Text selection
The children’s text reading levels were determined using the Scott Foresman booklets included in the Reading Recovery test packet. Nonfiction books read by each child were selected from the established, leveled Reading Recovery Book List at appropriate instructional levels determined by use of the Observation Survey Text Reading task.

Specific features should be considered when selecting nonfiction books for classroom use because the “nature of inquiry may be affected by the quality of nonfiction books” (Bamford & Kristo, 2000). I consulted the following criteria for selecting nonfiction books outlined by Bamford and Kristo:

- Information is presented accurately.
- Content is presented and related in a logical manner.
- The author’s style and voice set the tone of the book.
- Access features that facilitate accessibility of information include table of contents, inserts, indexes, and glossaries.
- Text is supported and enhanced by visual features such as illustrations, photos, timelines, diagrams, and captions.

When selecting nonfiction texts for instructional use with young children, it is essential to consider their reading proficiency. What elements of the task do they control? What support will the book provide? What might the challenges be? Considerations include (Moore, 1998)

- ability to control directionality and word-by-word matching;
- complexity of language structure ranging from simple, predictable structures to complex;
- familiar and technical vocabulary terms;
- number of words and gradient of difficulty;
- level of support of illustrations;
- page layout and format; and
- access features.

The children read Level 3, 5, and 6 books according to the Reading Recovery leveling system. General characteristics of the nonfiction books used during the reading response sessions contained the following elements:

- Most of the topics were familiar, yet some were more abstract or less well known to young children. Familiar topics included going to bed, playing, and farms. Unfamiliar topics might have been specific characteristics of bats and owls, and skiing.
- Pictures were supportive, but did not “tell all.”
- Most of the language structures in the books were similar to oral language, yet some were not. Snails lay eggs is a structure children might be familiar with. Snails do not look after their eggs sounds less like oral language. Language patterns were repeated in most of the books; sometimes patterns changed.
- The books contained many easy high-frequency words: can, I, we, my, a, in.
- Punctuation consisted of sentences ending with periods.
- Print layout and format were consistent within each particular book.
- Most pages contained one or two lines of text.
- Font was easy to read with adequate spacing between words.
- The books were 8 or 16 pages in length.
Reading response session format
In November, I met daily with the children individually in my small classroom for three consecutive nonfiction reading response sessions of approximately 20 minutes each. They read a different book during each session. A specific set of procedures was followed in the reading response sessions. (See Table 1.)

The procedures for each reading response session were implemented in the same manner; introductions were adapted to the particular contents in each book. The following is an example of the format I developed for the book, *What Lays Eggs?* (Gracestone, 1998), read by both Erica and Carley. My comments are designated by italics.

*What Lays Eggs?* – Level 6

1. Establish atmosphere through casual conversation. Engage in casual conversation to establish rapport.
2. Explain the reason for having the sessions. *Talking and reading with you will help me to figure out some good ways to help children learn to read new books. I’ll be writing things down and taping our time together to help me remember what we did.*
3. Introduce the book to discover children’s knowledge of the topic.

This book is called *What Lays Eggs? It is an information book.* Information books tell us about things. Before I read an information book, I think of some things I know about the topic. That helps me to read and learn new things. 

*I know that many animals lay eggs. Mosquitoes and butterflies are some animals I know that lay eggs. What are some animals you know that lay eggs?* Repeat the question two more times (to learn as much as I can about what the child knows about the topic).

4. Child previews the book. *Take a look through the book before you read.* Do not directly answer questions about specific concepts. If I do, note it. Possible responses to questions: *You might find out when you read; I wonder why; or What do you think?*

5. Child reads the book. Researcher takes a running record. Do not directly answer questions. If I do, note it. Responses to questions: *I wonder why; Keep reading maybe you’ll find out; or What do you think?*

If the child has difficulty solving a word, give a Told.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish atmosphere through casual conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Explain the reason for having the sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduce the book to discover children’s knowledge of the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Child previews the book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Child reads the book. Researcher takes a running record.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reader response conversation designed to reveal what was comprehended during reading. (not included in this article)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method of Analysis
Children’s oral reading behaviors were recorded on running record forms. Audio and videotapes were used to confirm, revise, and enhance written documentation. The standard recording and scoring procedures outlined in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002) were followed in order to make reliable comparisons of multiple readings by each student.

Clay (1991) specifies sources of information that readers use to understand written language: *meaning, structure and visual information.* Readers may use sources of information alone or simultaneously to maintain effective, accurate reading, as well as to solve unfamiliar words, phrases, or passages. I analyzed the errors and self-corrections in the running records to determine sources of information the children used to read.

After a careful analysis of the running records, I determined that further analysis was necessary to describe the complexities of children’s processing of nonfiction. In *Change Over Time*, Clay (2001) puts forth a theory of constructing working systems. Clay’s description of children’s construction of complex working systems includes a detailed description of knowledge sources put forth in Rumelhart’s Interactive model (Rumelhart, 1994). Rumelhart’s knowledge sources provided a framework for a more in-depth analysis of the running records. Thus, a second layer of analysis was conducted on the running records in order to detail how children constructed a processing system described in the next section of this article. Credibility of the analysis was established through 97% agreement with an inter-rater who was a doctoral student trained in Reading Recovery.
After an analysis of the knowledge sources evident in the errors and self-corrections, it became clear the early readers in this study were making decisions driven by meaning while assembling knowledge when reading nonfiction text. Nonfiction text in this study presented early readers with powerful opportunities to learn about how print works while learning about the content in the nonfiction books. Children’s decision making was evidenced by how they assembled knowledge sources using both successive and parallel processing. What follows is a detailed description of early reader’s opportunities to learn from nonfiction text.

Opportunities to Learn from Nonfiction Text

Early readers are learning to read and write. During the first 3 years of school, children develop a processing system that enables them to problem solve on increasingly difficult texts as they develop more sophisticated control over written language (Clay, 1991). In this study, the nonfiction texts provided powerful opportunities for children to learn about how print works. This was revealed by documenting the decision making evident in their reading behavior. First, evidence of both parallel and successive processing is described to illustrate how children learned about the content of the text while learning how to assemble knowledge sources. Then specific examples of learning opportunities are categorized by knowledge sources. Finally, instructional implications of the findings are discussed.

Rumelhart’s (1994) knowledge sources were used to describe how the children learned about print and include the following:

**Feature level knowledge.** Children begin to differentiate letters by their features as they learn how to read (Clay, 2001). Carley’s substitution indicates a simultaneous search for several sources of information including letter features:

*Text:* Bats eat at night.
*Child:* Bats eat all night.

The substitution was meaningful and grammatically correct. Carley’s search for visual information includes letter level information — *a* begins *at* and *all*. She may have searched for letter features as well; *l* and *t* have similar shapes. Early readers are developing visual perception; perhaps Carley did not discriminate between the two visually similar letters, or perhaps she did not visually scan the entire word.

**Letter-level knowledge.** Known letters provide “footholds” for children who are learning to read (Clay, 2001) by helping them solve new or unknown words when they read.

*Text:* Bats sleep all day.
*Child:* Bats (hesitated) /s/- sleep all day.

Erica solved sleep with a quick search for phonological information using the initial letter; I did not observe any other problem-solving behaviors.

**Letter-cluster knowledge.** Attending to letters as clusters or chunks enables children to solve unknown words when they read or write by finding analogies with what is known (Clay, 2001). Erica attempted to solve *sharp* using the cluster *sh*:

*Text:* sharp
*Child:* shuts

Although Erica was given the word, *sharp*, the attempt indicates increasing control over a cluster of letters embedded in print.

**Lexical-level knowledge.** “The words read are the vehicles for using letter-feature, letter-sound, and letter-cluster knowledge to clinch decisions” (Clay, 2001, p.109). Erica substituted *mommy/many* at the word level:

*Text:* Many animals lay eggs.
*Child:* Mommy animals lay eggs.

She substituted one visually similar word for another, using letter-feature knowledge. She did not discriminate at the letter-sound level; *m* and *n* have different sounds, and being in the medial position were harder to see. She clinched her decision because the sources of information fit.

**Syntactic knowledge.** Syntactical decision making is influenced by children’s spoken language, sentence beginnings, punctuation, intonation and expression, and phrased and fluent reading (Clay, 2001). The children appeared to have little difficulty accessing the simple text structures that comprised most of the language in the books, contributing to their developing awareness and control of written language structures. Carley and Erica both read the repeated phrase in *What Lays Eggs?* with little difficulty:

*Child:* Snakes lay eggs. Fish lay eggs. Snails lay eggs…

They both experienced difficulty with the phrase, *look after their eggs*. Carley read:

*Text:* after
*Child:* af, afric, af-i-t-y-ter

After several attempts Carley was told *after*. Although her solving attempts were at the letter and letter-cluster levels, she correctly read the repeated pattern on subsequent pages. Carley was learning more about syntactical structures that are presented in print.
Semantic-level knowledge. Children's life experiences and knowledge of print influence comprehending while reading (Clay, 1991; Goodman, 1994; Rumelhart, 1994). Carley substituted:

Text: Bats can live in a tree. Bats can live in a cave.
Child: Bats can leave in a tree. Bats can leave in a cave.
Child: Bats can live in a tree. Bats can live in a cave.

She reread to self-correct searching for additional meaning; Bats can live in a cave makes more sense than bats can leave in a cave.

Meaning driven processing
The children in this study engaged in powerful decision making while reading nonfiction texts. Parallel and successive processing reflect how children use multiple sources of information simultaneously or in succession. The children read a total of 754 words. Parallel processing was observed in 750 words (93%). Fifty (7%) successive processing attempts were observed. Observations of children’s reading behaviors provided evidence of how the children processed information and constructed meaning while they read nonfiction books.

Parallel processing. Accurate reading is parallel processing, indicating that all is going well with the reading process. All of the sources of information correspond to the text; the reader understands the message (Clay, 1991). Christopher read about ski apparel correctly; minimal attention was directed to solving words. “We put on our jackets. We put on our hats. We put on our goggles.”

Meaningful approximations that sound like correct reading signify parallel processing as children understand the message or content presented in the print. Carley’s meaningful substitution indicates a simultaneous search for several sources of information. She searched for meaning, structure, and visual information with the initial letter. All of the pieces fit and she read on; meaning was intact.

Text: Bats eat at night.
Child: Bats eat all night.

Successive processing. Successive solving and self-correction behaviors indicate a search for meaning. Erica originally searched for visual information at the initial letter level by articulating /f/. She made a subsequent search for meaning when she looked at the photograph of a furry bat. She solved fur successfully and continued reading.

Text: Bats have fur.
Child: Bats have, (hesitated), f-, (looked at picture) fur.

The children self-corrected errors. Frequently the errors were meaningful to begin with; self-corrections indicated a search for visual information and/or additional meaning. Erica self-corrected her substitution nails/claws.

Text: sharp claws
Child: sharp nails, claws

The error indicates that Erica searched for meaning while using structure. She self-monitored, realizing something was wrong, and conducted a successive search using visual information at the initial letter and/or word level; she may have searched for additional meaning as well. She self-corrected the error; all of the information fit.

Early readers learned about print as they constructed meaning by processing on the run and integrating information to read for meaning; attention was directed toward the message contained in the print. Parallel processing was indicated by accurate reading and meaningful substitutions that sounded like accurate reading and visually looked right; they used meaning, structure and/or visual information simultaneously. Successive processing was observed when the children solved words with a series of attempts and self-corrected errors; they attended to specific knowledge sources in a specific order. A model depicting the decision making and opportunities to learn while processing nonfiction text is represented in Figure 1.

Implications
What are the implications for Reading Recovery teachers? How can we help our students to process information presented in a variety of genres with competence and ease?

Help children learn about print and from print
Reading Recovery teachers regularly observe, record, and analyze how children learned from print as they constructed meaning by processing on the run and integrating information to read for meaning; attention was directed toward the message contained in the print. Parallel processing was indicated by accurate reading and meaningful substitutions that sounded like accurate reading and visually looked right; they used meaning, structure and/or visual information simultaneously. Successive processing was observed when the children solved words with a series of attempts and self-corrected errors; they attended to specific knowledge sources in a specific order. A model depicting the decision making and opportunities to learn while processing nonfiction text is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Opportunities to Learn Nonfiction Text

Parallel Processing
Meaning Driven Decision Making
Successive Processing
their students construct a complex set of strategies to learn about print. Analysis of errors, self-corrections, and problem-solving behaviors noted in running records and lesson records reveal how children may be attending to sources of information and processing strategically. We are good at figuring out how our students use meaning, structure, and visual information to process and learn about print.

But what about how our children learn from print? Consider what we might discover about our students if we extend our analysis and ask:

- How and when are my students processing all sources of information simultaneously or applying parallel processing?
- What behaviors do my students exhibit when sequentially analyzing one or more sources of information during successive processing attempts?
- How might I support what my children are learning about processing to enhance what they are learning from print?

Evidence of parallel processing and successive processing actions reveal how skillfully children make use of knowledge sources as they read. Parallel processing indicates that little overt attention is directed toward solving words; reading is proceeding smoothly, without apparent effort. It characterizes a “highly interactive parallel processing system” (Rumelhart, 1994, p. 889). Consideration and reflection of successive processing behaviors would enable Reading Recovery teachers to help children consolidate the successive steps to process multiple knowledge sources simultaneously.

We need to observe how children monitor and search for multiple sources of information, both simultaneously (parallel processing) or in steps (successive processing), to shape our language to support learning and to accelerate progress. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate how the process might look.

Looking for evidence of parallel processing and analyzing the nature of successive processing attempts will reveal how children’s attention toward meaning is driving their processing. Discovering what our children are learning about print can be used to facilitate more-effective processing behaviors. Consequently, the quality of our instruction and subsequent

### Table 2. Carley: Parallel Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Child: Bats eat all night</th>
<th>Text: Bats eat at night.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Carley knows about print</td>
<td>- Reading is meaningful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading must sound right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- She searches for initial letters to solve words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Letters have similar shapes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Carley learned from content presented in the print</td>
<td>Bats eat during the night. Her error is somewhat meaningful, but it would be highly unlikely that bats would eat all night.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does Carley need to know how to do?</td>
<td>Carley needs to monitor and search for final word parts in addition to meaning and structure and initial parts in words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible prompts/questions (Clay, 2005)</td>
<td>- What could this word be…?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What’s wrong with this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Processing will be more efficient and reading will become more meaningful as she monitors and searches for final parts in words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Erica: Successive Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Child: Bats have, (hesitated), /f/, (looked at picture) fur.</th>
<th>Text: Bats have fur.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What Erica knows about print</td>
<td>- Reading is meaningful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reading must sound right.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- She successively searches for multiple sources of information: visual information (initial letters) and meaning (illustrations).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Erica learned from content presented in the print</td>
<td>Bats have fur.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does Erica need to know how to do?</td>
<td>Erica needs to conduct a quick simultaneous search for information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible prompts/questions (Clay, 2005)</td>
<td>- You solved the puzzle here…Do you remember?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How did you do that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How did you know it was?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Erica will become a faster, more efficient word solver as she scans the whole word.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
learning will be enhanced as we help our students proficiently learn from print.

**Readable text**

We can make nonfiction texts readable by carefully selecting and designing introductions specifically personalized for each child.

Select books that are “well within the child’s control” (Clay, 2005, p. 36). Meaning is central to the process of reading. “Comprehension is very dependent on the difficulty level of the text” (Clay, 2002, p. 61). If a text is too hard a child may resort to using only one source of information, such as letter or word-level knowledge, to solve unknown words.

Select nonfiction books with the individual child in mind. Consider the characteristics of early readers and their literacy development, text reading level, and nonfiction qualities. Careful book selection by the teacher will enable Reading Recovery students to read nonfiction books proficiently, beginning in early lessons and continuing throughout their series of lessons.

Well thought out individualized introductions should facilitate a child’s abilities to read long stretches of text meaningfully and accurately with only a few occasions when attention is directed toward problem solving. I wanted to discover how the children processed nonfiction information independently. Therefore my conversational input before reading was minimal, as depicted by my comments before What Lays Eggs? “I know that many animals lay eggs. Mosquitoes and butterflies are some animals I know that lay eggs. What are some animals you know that lay eggs?”

Many animals lay eggs and mosquitoes were included in the book.

Although my comments were sparse, they related to the content in general and included a specific term and/or structure that was presented in the text; they may have activated prior knowledge of a book’s topic.

Reading Recovery students are entitled to inclusive introductions in order to proficiently read nonfiction materials. It is our responsibility to carefully plan book introductions designed to activate prior knowledge and incorporate some of the content and structures that may be difficult for our students to access on their first read. A caution regarding books with repeated sentence patterns: Emphasize meaning and content during introductions to facilitate meaningful reading rather than a mere recitation of repeated language structures. The result: successful, competent and capable processors of nonfiction information.

**Abundance of nonfiction**

This study demonstrates that children can develop processing behaviors when reading nonfiction as well as other genres. Therefore, Reading Recovery teachers will want to provide opportunities for our students to read and write nonfiction genres throughout their entire series of lessons.

Implications from this study clearly support the plea to expose primary children to an expanded repertoire of genres that include a greater representation of informational materials to create a better balance between narrative and nonfiction texts (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Donovan et al., 2000; Pappas, 1993). As teachers we can ask these questions:

- What genres are represented in our book boxes?
- How balanced is that representation?
- What genres are students reading and writing in our daily lessons?
- Are we providing ample opportunities for our students who prefer to read nonfiction to do so?
- How are we helping our students to become proficient with the genres they will read and write throughout their lives?

**Summary**

The young children in this study were early readers in their first year of school, just learning how to read. Their experiences as actual readers of nonfiction were limited. The children read and responded to the nonfiction books with minimal assistance from me. They were independent, active, constructors of meaning who demonstrated the ability to learn to read and read to learn. Exposure to an abundant assortment and variety of informational texts may spark an interest in reading that ignites the flame of literacy and may be especially pertinent for our struggling readers.

**References**


**Children’s Books Cited**


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