YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE:

FUNCTIONAL VS. THOUGHTFUL LITERACY

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Functional Literacy

- Definition
  - the use of basic skills in specific contexts (ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education)
  - vocational, home, community, and leisure skills (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2006) as well as the acquisition and use of those skills in the natural environment to ensure generalization (Brown et al., 1979).
- Examples
  - learning the alphabet, learning letter sounds, word decoding, instruction in sight words, filling out written forms, "reading" symbolated texts, environmental print lessons, and other "reductionist interventions" (Katims, 2000)

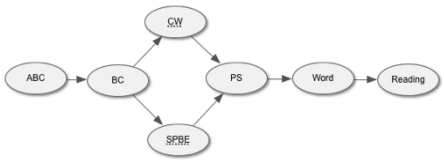
Thoughtful Literacy

- Definition
  - Independent use of reading and writing to enhance understanding, communication, and quality of life as determined by successful achievement of individual and societal goals.
- Examples
  - Skyping your brother in Afghanistan; writing a love note to your girlfriend; following a recipe; using written schedules for independence; using 1st letter cuing to support dysarthric communication

Assumptions and Issues

- Functional literacy
  - Student is too _____ to learn to read and write.
  - Functional literacy is often neither *functional* nor *literacy*.
  - Plays to our prejudices
    - i.e., Lack of muscle control = intellectual incapability
  - Restrictive, doesn't account for learning opportunity, teaching quality, environmental supports.
  - Begs the question, "What part of literacy is non-functional?"
  - Unsupported by literacy theory or research.
- Thoughtful literacy
  - Universal literacy, the "least dangerous assumption" (Donnellan, 1984)

Morris et al. (2003) Beginning Reading Model



Some Outcomes of Functional Literacy Programs

- Jeremy, a young adult with Down syndrome, reads all texts aloud. He doesn't know that you can read text silently.
- Alex, a young adult with autism, knows all the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make in isolation. He doesn't know how to spell nor that upper and lower case letters are paired.
- Ellie, a young woman with Rett syndrome, can understand most texts her mother explains to her. She can't understand any that are read to her nor can she read herself.
- The largest teacher preparation program in NC has no literacy methods course in its special education masters program.
- Michael and Conor are enrolled in a university-based, post-secondary program for young adults with intellectual disabilities. This "functional" program has no literacy instruction.

Functional Literacy's Greatest Potential Flaw

We pass through this world but once.
Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life,
few injustices deeper than the denial
of an opportunity to strive or even to hope,
by a limit imposed from without,
but falsely identified as lying within.

Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man, 1981

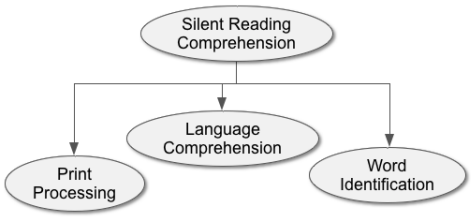
TOWARD THOUGHTFUL LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND OUTCOMES:

7 IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

Principle #1: Thoughtful Literacy Requires Thinking

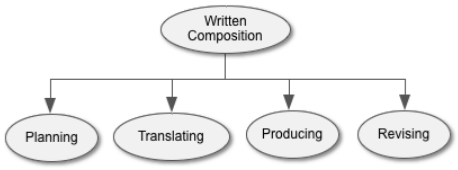
- Core teaching goals
  - Cognitive clarity
    - Prerequisite to generalization and long-term use of skills, knowledge, and processes.
    - Why are you teaching what you are teaching right now?
    - i.e., Teach literacy functionally, not functional literacy.
  - Cognitive engagement
    - Prerequisite to learning
    - Critical metaphor shift from *challenge*

Principle #2: Teachers Must Have a Theory of Reading Instruction and…



Cunningham, 1993

Writing Instruction



Flower & Hayes (1981)
Koppenhaver et al. (1994)

Principle #3: Teachers Must Recognize that Learners Have Different Strengths and Needs

- Comprehensive Literacy Instruction = 4 + 1
  - 4 (2 hrs)
    - Reading comprehension instruction and experience
    - Written composition instruction and experience
    - Letter, sound, and word instruction
    - Motivation
  - +1 (1/2 hr)
    - Diagnosis and intervention in area of greatest need

Principle #4: Test (Much) Less and Teach (Much) More

- Things we forgot we knew in the push to test, test, test:
  - Tests don't teach; teachers teach.
  - Instructional time is finite and precious.
    - Once lost, it is lost forever.
  - It takes years to become literate.
    - NOTHING significant to literacy learning changes in a week.
  - Good teachers cannot teach without constant (observational) assessment.
    - Which does NOT interrupt instruction.
  - Two points determine a line.

Principle #5: Recognize Scientifically-Based Instruction for What It Is and…

- One, ***and only one***, source of information that should inform classroom decision-making and instructional-planning.

What It Isn't

- It is not:
  - Based on students with significant disabilities.
  - A comprehensive picture of the classroom.
  - A comprehensive picture of all instructional options.
  - Representative of teacher creativity.
  - Inclusive of assistive technology or augmentative communication.
  - The word of God.
- If used slavishly, it eliminates teacher creativity and problem-solving and condemns us to go only where others have gone before.

Principle #6: Teach Literacy Functions Not Functional Literacy

- Function
  - Def. the purpose for which something is designed or exists

Principle #7: Raise Expectations and Lower Standards

An Illustrative Story:
My Classmate Andy

Thoughtful Literacy and Disability Resources

- Karen Erickson and David Koppenhaver. (2007). *Children with Disabilities Reading and Writing the Four Blocks Way*.
- Tar Heel Reader, http://tarheelreader.org/. Free, online books for beginners, especially older beginners.
- Dave Koppenhaver's homepage, http://faculty.rcoe.appstate.edu/koppenhaverd/, links to literacy, disability, and technology resources.
- Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/, links to all sorts of research , education, materials, other resources.
- Center for Disability Studies in Literacy, Language, and Learning. http://www.uni.edu/accessliteracy/, links to all sorts of research, materials, other resources.
- https://sites.google.com/site/bawollak/,