

Tapping the Power of the Cooperative Strip Paragraph— A Project GLAD® Writing Strategy

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Promising practices...

Writing is a challenging task for students of all ages. Although it is a skill that must be mastered for a student's success in the world of higher education, it is typically not fully developed and honed until students are in these very post-secondary institutions (Pressley, et al. (Eds.), 2007). The teaching of writing is also a challenging task for K-12 teachers. Most teacher preparation programs only skim the surface of the complicated task of teaching writing as a process to students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Project GLAD®, a teacher professional development model out of the Orange County Department of Education National Training Center, provides a powerful approach for teaching the process of writing called the Cooperative Strip Paragraph. This strategy not only provides a scaffold for students to begin the writing process in an engaging, authentic manner—it also scaffolds teachers in planning for intentional and interactive delivery of instruction in the writing process, with a gradual release of responsibility to the students based on content deeply learned in the classroom.

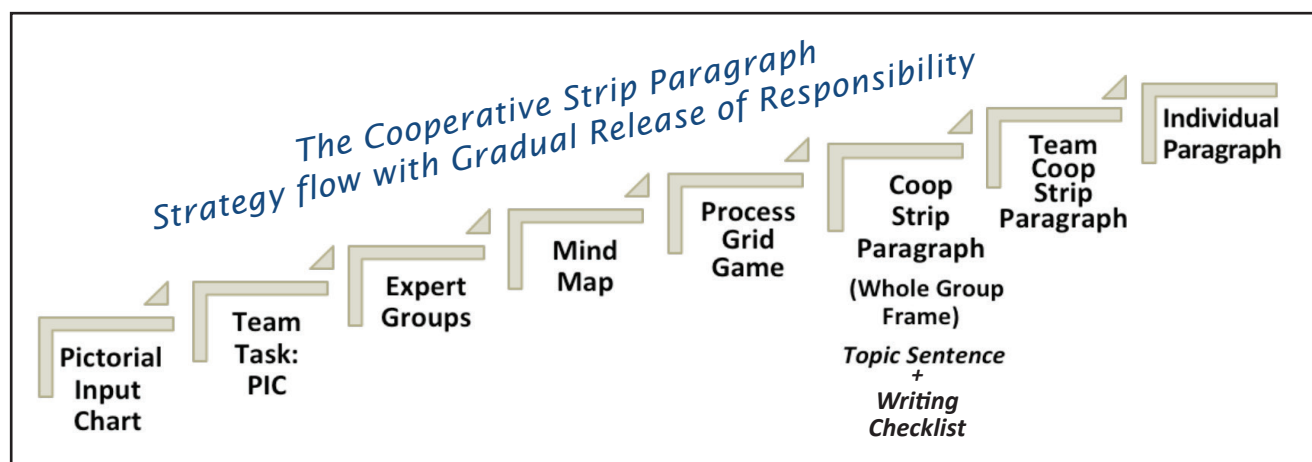
If you have experienced a six-day Project GLAD® Tier I certification training, you know that the Cooperative Strip Paragraph, also known as the Whole Group Frame in early childhood settings, is a culminating activity that brings together a wealth of content and language modeling, learning, and practice. Below is a graphic that describes the scaffolding of content and language that would take place when classroom instruction is closely following the Project GLAD® sequence.

I will briefly describe each of these steps using an example from a third grade science unit called *Forces that Change the Earth*. The big idea of this unit is that there are forces in nature that change the Earth both slowly and quickly.

- **The Pictorial Input Chart (PIC)** for this unit is focused on volcanoes. The teacher would deliver the content and language about the force of volcanoes in an illustrated lecture format with the students up front and close. The PIC is lightly penciled in and then visually brought to life in color while the teacher delivers the content orally; each category of information is filled in with a different colored marker. Teachers prompt the students to repeat the words and phrases placed on the chart during the delivery of content. After a “chunk” of information is placed on the chart, the teacher then prompts students to “turn and talk” about what they have just learned, targeting specific content. (“Turn and talk to an elbow partner about the effects that volcanoes have on the environment.”) On another day, the teacher facilitates an interactive review of the chart's content and language with word cards and pictures. The chart becomes a living document that students reference and add to throughout the unit.

- **Team Task**—The Volcanoes PIC would then become one of the team tasks that is completed with each team members' input in a different colored pencil. Teams reference the content and language of the chart and negotiate for meaning through classroom structures that emphasize cooperation while they re-create the PIC. During this time, the teacher is facilitating small guided reading groups called Expert Groups.

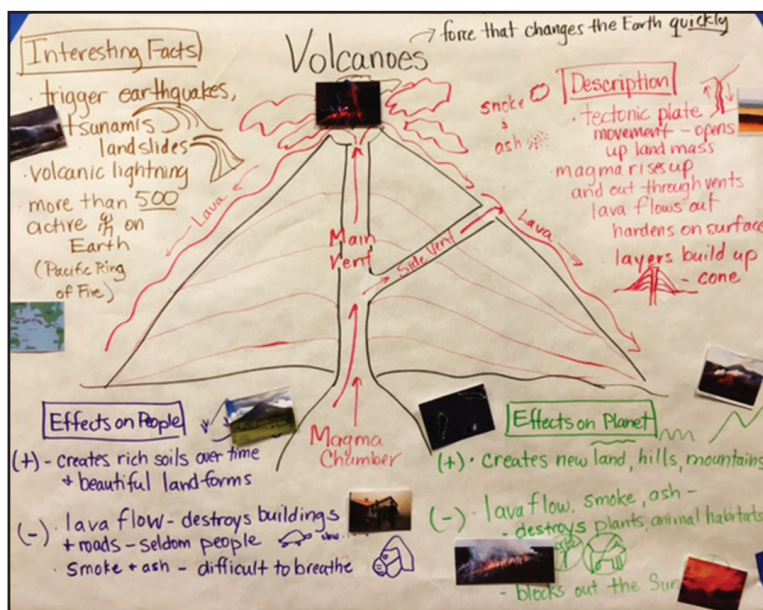
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• **Expert Groups** are made up of one member from each team. The Expert Group text has been intentionally crafted by the teacher to connect to the PIC's categories of information. In this unit, there is an Expert Group text for each of the following forces: Earthquakes, Erosion, Landslides, and Weathering. With teacher modeling, each student reads, discusses, highlights, sketches, and takes notes on the Expert Group text. The teacher provides heavy scaffolding at the beginning of the reading and then gradually releases the responsibility to students. Each "expert" transfers the most important information regarding the categories in the text (Description, Effects on the Planet, Effects on People and Interesting Facts) to a Mind Map, which is a variation of a Thinking Map®. These categories are the same as those developed in the PIC on Volcanoes on this page. Each student will serve as the expert for their team on the particular content they have read and taken notes on during the highly engaging Process Grid Game.



Pictorial Input Chart—Volcanoes, from *Forces that Change the Earth*, 3rd grade Project GLAD® unit

• In preparation for the **Cooperative Strip Paragraph**, the teacher crafts a topic sentence around the content of the unit that matches the targeted writing genre and writes this sentence on a sentence strip that is placed in a pocket chart. In the *Forces that Change the Earth* unit, a topic sentence in the genre of expository writing

might be "People and their environment are affected by various natural forces that occur suddenly or slowly over time." With the students up front and close, the teacher facilitates a whole group discussion about the topic sentence, highlighting important words that help set the stage for the supporting sentences. The teacher then physically "walks" the process grid with her fingers, pointing to different information while orally crafting

sentences of varying patterns that support the topic sentence. Then, students turn to a partner and orally create more supporting sentences to share with the group. At this point, the students are ready to go back to their teams and cooperatively compose an academic sentence that they will write on a sentence strip in their team color and hang underneath the topic sentence in the pocket chart. (With emerging writers, this process is called the **Whole Group Frame** and teachers scribe the teams' oral sentences.) When all teams have their sentences placed, the teacher calls the students up front and close to begin the process of revising and editing with the scaffold of a writing checklist.

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• **The Process Grid Game** is a whole-class activity with teams discussing what information to place inside a grid representing the content from the PIC and the Expert Groups. Teams are directed to "put their heads together" and prepare to report out, earning team points, as the teacher records information on the Process Grid. Each team member has a different number and the teacher uses numbered spoons or sticks to determine who will report out for each team. In this way, every student is accountable for knowing the content and language for reporting out. By the end of the game, the Process Grid is filled with detailed information and language about the unit's content. Students are highly engaged in academic conversation and content knowledge is solidified. Now the class is ready to engage in the Cooperative Strip Paragraph strategy.

| Force | Description | Effects on the planet | Effects on people | Interesting Facts |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Volcanoes | | | | |
| Earth-quakes | | | | |
| Erosion | | | | |
| Landslides | | | | |
| Weathering | | | | |

Process Grid: *Forces that Change the Earth*

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| Writing Checklist Forces that Change the Earth unit | |
|--|--|
| We read our writing. | |
| What did we like? | |
| Revising | |
| • Are our ideas organized? | |
| • Does the writing make sense? | |
| • Have we included the most important facts? | |
| • Do we have a variety of sentence patterns? | |
| • Have we used linking words and phrases? | |
| • Do we have a conclusion? | |
| Editing | |
| • Did we use correct capitalization and punctuation? | |
| • Is our spelling correct? | |
| Title? | |
| Author, Date? | |

- The **Writing Checklist** is created by the teacher to match the targeted ELA and ELD language arts standards of the unit. It begins with the positive by celebrating what the students like about their writing, then moves into the elements of revision, and finishes with editing. Above is an example of a writing checklist for this unit based on the 3rd Common Core Standards for ELA. With the students up front and close, the teacher facilitates a whole class discussion about the writing they have just created in teams by using this checklist. The teacher uses out-loud thinking to model the use of the checklist while encouraging students to give their input about any revisions and edits. As revisions and edits are agreed upon, the teacher is physically moving, tearing, and adding to the sentence strips in the pocket chart, adding any language and editing changes in a black marker. Together, the group crafts a concluding statement and title and makes sure to write the author's name on the paragraph. This Cooperative Strip Paragraph can be then be used in many reading and writing activities to support fluency and to build students' identity as authors.

- Now that the writing process has been heavily scaffolded for students, they are ready to move on to creating a **Team Cooperative Strip Paragraph** using mini-pocket charts and a different topic sentence created by the teacher, or when ready, the team itself. Teams use the same writing checklist to revise and edit their supporting sentences and craft a team conclusion for the paragraph. This writing provides a formative assessment of students' understanding of the writing process.

- All of the supports are now in place for each student to experience success in writing their own **individual paragraph** using the same writing checklist. This piece of writing would be used as formative and summative assessment of the students' writing in this genre.

Taking students through all of these steps of the Project GLAD® Cooperative Strip Paragraph strategy requires a commitment of time and energy which may

not be available to all teachers. However, the salient features of this strategy are powerful and could be replicated in any extensive learning experience that includes teacher facilitation of deep learning of content and language focusing on comprehensibility, student talk, and teacher modeling of the writing process. The writing checklist scaffolds a gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the students for the elements of revision and editing. The big idea for teachers is that students need to have a deep understanding of the content and the language to express their ideas, as well as the scaffolded modeling of the writing process with plenty of practice before they are asked to produce individual pieces of writing successfully.

The Cooperative Strip Paragraph strategy opens the door to specific genres of writing, most often expository, in an authentic and engaging way. It is only a part of a comprehensive writing program, such as Writer's Workshop (Calkins, 2013). The power of this strategy is that it provides a scaffold for both teachers and students to enter into—and experience success with—academic writing in a modeled, interactive, and supportive manner.

Pressley, M., et al. (Eds). (2007) *Shaping Literacy Achievement: Research We Have, Research We Need*. New York: Guilford Press.



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