The KWL strategy can be applied in a variety of content areas with a range of text material. Figure 5.3, for example, is a KWL chart created by an eighth grader reading about the formation of mountains. In this example, note that the student appeared to have little prior knowledge on the topic. As a result of a liberal exchange of ideas in small groups and with the whole class, she asked some excellent questions (in the W column) that were answered by the reading. In cases in which students’ questions cannot be answered by the text, many teachers will ask students to pursue answers to these questions through research and present their findings to the class.

Students will develop the ability to use the KWL strategy on their own through instruction that gradually shifts responsibility for initiating the strategy from you to your students (Kiefer, 2001). After you introduce the strategy with a textbook example and model KWL thinking by describing how you would develop a chart, you should ask students to implement it on their own. Cooperative groups are ideal for helping learn and extend expertise with the strategy. Your role should gradually become one of providing feedback, informally observing, discussing, and reinforcing independence and transfer. As with most content area reading/writing/learning strategies, you can improve the likelihood that students will use this strategy on their own if you demonstrate how using KWL to activate prior knowledge and set purposes for reading facilitates their class performance and helps meet your expectations for learning.

ANTICIPATION GUIDES

Another highly regarded strategy for activating prior knowledge of text topics and helping students set purposes for reading is the anticipation guide. You should be somewhat familiar with this strategy already since you have been asked to complete an anticipation guide for each chapter of this book. This strategy involves giving students a list of statements about the topic to be studied and asking them to respond to them before reading. Guides are particularly useful when they provoke disagreement and challenge students’ beliefs about a topic. They should reinforce relevant prior knowledge and modify misconceptions about the topic (Duffelmeyer & Baum, 1992; Merkley, 1996/97; White & Star Johnson, 2001). This function seems especially important given research evidence indicating that students’ existing prior knowledge and biases will be superimposed on text information when the two are at odds (Marshall, 1989). In other words, if misconceptions about a topic are not cleared up before reading, they may still exist after reading.

Anticipation guides should contain statements that are text and reader based. In addition, Duffelmeyer (1994) recommends the inclusion of certain statements that force students to reconsider existing beliefs. He suggests that four kinds of statements have the potential to do this: (1) those that are related to the major ideas students will encounter; (2) those that activate students’ prior knowledge; (3) those that are general rather than specific; and (4) those that challenge students’ beliefs. We recommend that guide statements be written to appear correct but incompatible with the information students will encounter or to seem incorrect yet compatible with the information to follow.