

Teacher Commentaries: Goals of Research

Kindergarten: Irby DuBose, Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

J: Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant (Interviewer); I: Irby DuBose, (Teacher)

J: So what are your goals? What are you trying to make happen here?

I: I really want my children to embrace being a researcher. I think it's a really authentic way of teaching, I think it makes sense. It's how we learn as adults, so I think my role in kindergarten is to give them skills that will help them become proficient, successful adults. We try to teach as authentically as we can, and I have found that research is the way to do that with my children. This is my fourth year teaching in this manner, and the children really respond well to it.

J: So are there certain skills that you feel that they learn better in this kind of an environment? What are some examples maybe.

I: My background is in reading and teaching reading, my masters is in reading, and I feel like and I read about it in Stephanie Harvey's *Comprehension and Collaboration* book, the skills that they need to become proficient readers, the skills they need to have good comprehension, inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, activating background knowledge, all of those skills they use in research. And they also need them to be good comprehenders. So I love how the research skills are used to strengthen their reading as well. So I've found that even with our struggling readers, they respond well to this type of instruction, and as a result, their reading seems to grow as well. It's a really interesting partnership. One little boy to today who was really learning a lot today, you could tell, he's actually a below grade level reader. But this type of environment, he was really learning from it and you would never have known. The skills that he was using to learn will help him become a better reader.

He was looking at the pictures and talking about what he was noticing, and he was talking about questions that we've had, like are penguins different colors, and he immediately thought, well this penguin is blue, and this one is brown, so they must be different colors. They must not all be black and white. These are things that he's not ready to read yet, but he can definitely learn from a picture.

And really as a teacher, that's a struggle that we have, how do you really reach the children that are struggling. It's really easy in more traditional instruction that they'll tune out, and then you get the behavior problems, and they're not learning.

So it's almost like the reading ability when you get in this environment, it doesn't hold them back.

Everybody is able to learn, nobody feels self-conscious because they can't read the words .

And I've noticed it every year, the children who struggle the most are the most engaged with this type of instruction.

Grade 1: Apryl Whitman, Meadowfield Elementary School, Columbia, SC

J = Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant; A= Apryl Whitman, Teacher

J: As they're doing this work, there are certain concepts in science that you want them to learn, that we've begun to talk about. They're also learning how to use literacy to get to science, right. So talk about this integration.

A: I love that way of teaching. I think that teaching in isolation is pointless, and it's not time effective.

Making it as real as possible for them, because in real life, everything is integrated and connected. That's how they're going to see their future and what they encounter. So I think bringing in those science concepts – and this is also social studies for us as well, about natural resources – bringing it in where it makes it applicable for them and interesting and it makes it a real life problem, engages them more and is going to increase their learning and their interest with it as well. So making sure they're getting the content, but it's led kind of on their own, it makes them more engaged in it. They're learning more through it because they're the ones doing it, learning, coming up with the questions and answers and finding it. It's not just me sitting up there presenting it to them, reading a science book during science time. I'm making it meaningful because it's project based. It's applicable for their lives and what's going on.

J: And they're recognizing how these literacy skills actually help you-

A: Help in other areas

J: learn something.

A: Yes, exactly. That reading is not just from 8:00 – 10:00 and that's it, let's move on. Everything is integrated, everything leans off of each other. I could probably pull some math into this as well.

Reading helps us learn. It's not just you're teaching guided reading and phonics and all that, but reading takes us places.

Grade 2: Philippa Haynes, New Prospect Elementary School, Inman, SC

J = Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant; P=Philippa Haynes, Teacher

J: So the kids are going to conduct their own research in the unit. Talk a little about – and you talked in the lesson about them being researchers. So why the emphasis on them as researchers?

P: I think it's really important for students to realize that school is to help them become thinkers.

CAPTION: Philippa Haynes, Second Grade Teacher, Inman, SC We want to promote life long educators, but we're not promoting life-long educators if we're just asking them a question and expecting the right answer. They have to go through that process themselves, and we talked a lot about how you research information and you have a question and then you go back and research some more. It's almost like this never-ending cycle.

I think in turn that's also very difficult for some of your students who do have higher reading levels, and they're used to being told, "that's right, that's right," Doing a unit like this can be extremely challenging for them, because all of a sudden, there really isn't a right or wrong answer, there's just deeper thinking and deeper questioning, and that can be intimidating for them, especially when they feel like, "I've always been good at school, and I know how school works, I give them the right answer and I'm good to go." I think doing a unit like this is extremely helpful, especially in helping those students, when we talk about how can I help a child who is already at a high reading level, this is a great way to do that.

J: Sure is, because they understand that it's not just about –

P: Getting the right answer.

Teacher Commentary Transcripts: Preparation for Inquiry

Kindergarten: Irby DuBose, Pate Elementary, Darlington, SC

J: Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant (Interviewer); I: Irby DuBose, (Teacher)

J: Thank you so much for inviting us and allowing us to watch your lovely kindergarteners as researchers.

I: You're welcome.

J: This is March. They've got a lot of skills already here as researchers. So what have you done prior to this to get them to where they are now, where they're really ready to dive into this kind of work.

I: At beginning of the year, exposed them to non-fiction books, we do independent reading, and slip them into their independent reading bags. It's not me saying, this is a nonfiction books, it's just putting them in there mixed in with the fiction books so they are exposed to them. We try to have NF books around the room, so they are always aware that there are nonfiction books and fiction books, and they start to develop that differentiation as the year progresses.

J: In terms of learning about nonfiction, they've learned what it is, what different kinds of books are, and then you've done a bunch of work with text features. You want to talk about what did with text features.

I: We kind of just, we started around Xmas, after Xmas really focusing on the features. I would just open the door, and say, What are you noticing? Please tell me what you are noticing. As they noticed things, I would chart them. They might say, "I notice these words are dark," and not know what it means yet, OK we'll add it to the chart. Or they might notice labels. They don't know they're called labels, but they notice there is something there. I like to start with what do you notice and we make a chart from there and that chart's back there of all the things they've noticed. Then we work more on what is the name of that feature, what is its purpose, and then we talk about it. Really, throughout the year the kids notice everything I hope they would notice. It didn't take me saying, "this is a label, a label gives something a name. It was more that they noticed a label, and they we talked about what its purpose was.

I: With the actual research, at the beginning of the year, we focus more on the structure of how we want it to look at the end of the year at the beginning. So we do stations, and today they were all doing the same stations, which is something we'll do when we're starting a new unit, but as the unit progresses, they'll go to different stations. So we start the stations at the beginning of the year, but they might be more based on just what the kids need, like if they need a little more help with writing, we might just have a book making station or a writing station. They aren't focused solely on the research, just the structure of the station. Then as the year progresses, we incorporate more inquiry and research into the stations. I know with kindergarten, and I'm sure it's like this with every grade, you have to have those structures and routines in place, or the kids are really lost. So we start the stations at the beginning of the year, and then gradually incorporate more nonfiction and more research into the stations. And then when we start a new unit, we always do something like we did today, where we are whole group first, everybody is doing the same station. They're in kindergarten, so everybody still needs a lot of support, a lot of scaffolding, and this is the way I found works the best. When they are researching their own animal, they are a bit more confident and more aware of what they're supposed to be doing.

J: What are the other stations you've taught them that you'll incorporate into this unit?

I: We do graffiti board, we do book making and that's where they take their learning and make nonfiction books. We do fact tree, where they look at books but they focus more on the words if they're ready and write their learning on sticky notes and stick them on the tree. Our tree is right there but it's empty now because we started a new unit. We have a new one called snapshot and that's where I have pictures like big photographs of whatever we're studying and they can practice seeing what they can learn just from the pictures.

Then we have a buddy reading station where they have nonfiction books hopefully on their level, and they practice reading to one another about whatever they're studying. The secret of that station is that it's also helping their fluency, but they're learning too, because they books are on their level if I can find them. That's a challenge I do have, trying to find NF books on their levels, so we have to get creative. And then we have a journal writing station where they look at nonfiction books and write in journals about what they're learning. And then we have a classroom library and there are nonfiction books in there. They have iPads that they use and computers.

Grade 1: Apryl Whitman, Meadowfield Elementary School, Columbia, SC

J = Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant; A= Apryl Whitman, Teacher

J: How did you prepare them earlier in the year for being able to learn from informational text? What were some of the things that you did?

A: I implement reading workshop in the classroom and the whole first 9 weeks of the school year were teaching those strategies, of ways I can still get information, I can still learn from the text, even though I might not be able to read the words.

A: I did a lot of modeling, again, during my reader's workshop time, I would model using a lot of different informational texts, a variety of magazines, big books, little books, posters I've used as well. Just teaching them that when we read informational text we're getting facts or information from them. I'm going to walk away with something new that I didn't know before. So modeling that through the use of sticky notes, and jotting down our thoughts or pictures and labeling them. I love labeling. It's a great way for children who may not be able to get that complete sentence down but can get that picture and that label down. So I did a lot of modeling and they would go out and they would do the same with any type of nonfiction piece they wanted to read. So I didn't just stick with books. In their baskets they've had magazines, they have posters, a variety of nonfiction texts, and they would practice writing down the information that they learned and then bringing it back to the carpet to share. So it made it a point to why they were doing that, I'm going to come back and teach somebody something new. And recently we started building on that and working on asking questions, so that when I do go into an informational piece, I may have questions while I'm reading so I want to jot that down and then look for answers to them. We're working on that now.

J: At some point, you taught them about nonfiction text features as well?

A: Yes, I did. We have a chart back there. I used The Comprehension Toolkit and did some lessons from there. At the beginning we focused solely on those features and how nonfiction text does have these features and that's very different from the fiction we're used to seeing. And how those different features can offer us different facts and information as well, not just the words on the page.

Grade 2: Philippa Haynes, New Prospect Elementary, Inman, SC

J = Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant; P=Philippa Haynes, Teacher

J: The kids have already learned some things about nonfiction this year. So talk about how you've prepared them to take on this research/inquiry unit.

P: Prior to this unit, we did an informational text feature unit. We looked at all the features of nonfiction – headings, table of contents, etc. We talked about not only being able to find the location of these features, but their purpose, what they can be used for. We also have done a lot of work prior to this unit about finding information and then going back and summarizing. I talk with my kids about how we can't just copy straight from one resource, we have to be able to put it in our own words. In addition to learning the different features of nonfiction, we've done a lot of work with rereading it, flipping the book over and being able to explain what I read, and then writing it down.

What It Means to Be a Researcher Interviews with Kindergarten Students Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

I=Irby DuBose, teacher, S = students

I: H, what do you think about being a researcher?

S: A researcher is a, you can read or write a book.

I: How does it make you feel?

S: Like a grown-up.

I: It makes you feel like a grown-up? Why?

S: Because researchers help you. Researchers help you when you get sick.

I: Oh, we talked about that, about how somebody, someday, had to research how to make people feel better when they get sick.

I: An, what does it mean to be a researcher?

S: That they ask a lot of questions and sometimes they research animals.

I: What do you do when you research?

S: And they research animals and they research like books and other books. And they research nonfiction books.

I: Asia, what do you think about being a researcher?

S: It's fun being a researcher

I: Why?

S: Because you'll be able to be right or wrong and being wrong is OK.

I: You're right. You can be wrong and it's OK.

What else do you do when you research?

S: You look at a lot of books.

I: What else?

S: You can just ask questions when you see them in a book or on a tablet or something.