

Teacher Commentary Transcript

J = Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant; P = Philippa Haynes, New Prospect Elementary School, Inman, SC)

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

J: The tornado group, when they were drawing their conclusions about the safety, I asked them what they had done, and they showed me their diagram of the tornado and they said, see, it's going up so you'd want to be down below. So that diagram that they drew really helped them to hold onto information.

P: And I don't think that group has ever in any of the research come across what they should do if a tornado comes. SO that was really interesting to see that group, because they really came up with it all by themselves. I don't think any of their resources had talked about safety for them, so they really went in with a blank slate and used all their information to draw that conclusion.

J: You've clearly done a lot of work with them in their being able to talk with one another, to work in a group together, to listen and ask questions of each other. So talk about some of the things you've done to promote that.

P: At our school, we've initiated something called Focus 5, which essentially talks about cooperation, teamwork, how to work with others, concentration, different skills that are helpful when you're trying to learn. So we have a lot of conversations about making things your focal point, and what that means, and what your brain should be doing during that time, and putting away distractions. We've also played some cooperation games to help students understand that even if we are not agreeing on something, we don't have to give up on it. There's ways to compromise. So we do a lot of beginning of the year activities about that, and then I make sure that in my lessons I'm giving opportunities for them to apply those skills that we've learned. So I definitely think it's beneficial before starting a unit like this to give students opportunities to get into small groups and have conversations about whatever they're learning.

J: I did hear you when the kids were deciding whose paper to use, and somebody did compromise

P: One of my boys, he said we'll just let him do it, and he really wanted it, you could see he wanted us to use his paper, and he was, it's OK. And we talk about that too, sometimes you just have to let it go, for the benefit of the group. And really it was beneficial for his group because they were able to get started and didn't spend the whole time fussing at each other about whose paper they were going to use for this project.

J: And I think once they see that once they get started it accomplishes something, I think that reinforces that it was a good thing to do. Again, they are learning it by seeing the effects in real life, as opposed to just you're supposed to do this and the teacher might say "Good boy" if you do.

SHARE

J: In the course of just these few days, they've put into practice – first just noticing their own learning, all the work you did about the Wow facts, and then questioning it and questioning it deeper, looking at multiple resources and the different ways you use them, and then finally drawing these conclusions . Do you want to talk about what you noticed today about the drawing conclusions about the safety tips?

P: I thought it was just fantastic that they were able to take all this information, and you could almost tell right away that they were already thinking about what would I do, but they hadn't said it out loud

yet. So the moment that I gave them that opportunity to tell about what they know about what your severe weather looks like, and said what would you do if it was coming, and giving them that opportunity to voice what would be beneficial was fascinating. They were pretty much right on the ball every single time. They recognized pretty quickly what they needed to do. When we in the circle and the flood came up, and they were sharing the facts about the flood, and all of a sudden it almost sparked it, and I didn't tell them that's what we were going to do next about safety, but they thought what would you do, if I go up a mountain is the flood going to come up to me still, I know it can't go up a hill, you could see those conversations forming. It's just the building process. It's a perfect example of how they're building on their knowledge.

J: And I guess also the fact that in this research they had different subtopics but they're all related, so I today they really were learning from each other, and they questions they were asking. The one little boy in the conclusion part after the tornado kids said you needed to go down, and the flood folks said you needed to go up,

P: And he said, that's the opposite – that's the complete opposite. Or even one of my little girls said, "Well if a hurricane's coming, does that mean you could have a flood too?" And I said, yes, sometimes you have to think about two different types of severe weather going on. They were making those connections without me even prompting. It was more they were having these thoughts as we were sitting in a circle having a conversation about it.

J: Which is really what we want. That the thinking is coming from them, it's not them just – if you compare that with if you had a list of questions about a flood or tornado, that you were just asking them –

P: I don't think it would have been as meaningful at all. They would have answered the questions, if I had done a question/answer format, they would have just answered them, alright, I'm done, is it lunch yet? And with this, I guarantee you, they're talking about it at lunch right now. I think it's going to carry over as something they're really fascinated about. And just having that openness about - I tried to compare it to sitting at the lunchroom table, we don't raise our hands when we're having conversations at lunch, you're not, "Oh, choose me, please." I think that's important for kids to understand too. Sometimes in school children think they're only supposed to talk or think aloud when they're told, and I understand that has its place, but we also want to encourage them to have conversations, and what's appropriate and what's not. So they got a chance to practice that also today.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

J: We were talking the other day about how as the kids are doing research and inquiry we are also doing research and inquiry into what works with them

P: For me, one of the things I realized during this unit, there were moments where I thought, maybe this isn't working, maybe this isn't happening as well as I wanted it to, or are they really understanding, do I need to back up a little bit, but as I think as we go on through the lessons, I realize that the reason they weren't picking it up as quickly as I thought they would the first or second lesson was just they needed more time. I think when you're doing a unit like this to keep that in the back of your mind. Yes, there are adjustments that need to be made. Like today, I didn't really have them write anything (more of this), but overall just pushing through the unit and seeing how it plays out is also really important. If you had asked me after the first or second lesson I might have said, I don't know how it's going to go. But now that we've finished up this 5th lesson, I'm really excited about what they're learning, and it's really interesting to see how they've developed these skills over just the last couple of days.

J: Time is I guess that's another one of the benefits of this type of unit, because time is so difficult to get in the classroom. But this is a situation where they're learning the science, social studies, reading

all at once, so you can spend a little more time because look at how many different skills and strategies they have been developing over these few days by having the topic be consistent and growing the information.

P: I've taught second grade standards for several years now, and I've done it before where they just learn about each of the types of severe weather we talked about today, and then they just tell me some safety precautions. But I guarantee through this unit and pretty much figuring that out for themselves, I think this will stay with them. I think if I went and asked some of my previous second graders who are in fourth or fifth grade now, hey do you remember when we talked about this, they'd be like, "no." I think that these kids will remember it, because this was something that really they came up with all by themselves. So that's something important to keep in mind too. What's the lasting effect going to be from the lessons?

J: Which is coming from them owning it

P: And coming to that conclusion themselves. Because once they have ownership of something, they really feel like, I need to be held accountable for this, I'm going to keep this piece of information that I've learned.

J: And that reminds me, over the first couple of days there were times when kids said, "Oh, this is hard," and you responded, yeah, sometimes research is hard. But now I think when kids see that hard isn't necessarily bad, and can lead you

P: Has benefits

J: to real interesting things and has benefits, that's such an important lesson.

P: It is. And sometimes you just have to get through the hard part to actually have your aha moment.