

Teacher Commentary Transcript

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PRIOR TO THE LESSON

J: We saw an earlier lesson researching about penguins with the graffiti boards. So since then you've done some other ways of teaching them how to work on their research. So can you share some of the things that you've done?

I: Sure. One thing that we've done is sketch to stretch. That's where we take a book and look at a picture and read the words. I wanted to give them with this categories of what to look for. So I gave them what does it eat, where does it live, what does it look like, and just a fun fact. My logic behind this is it's a segue into the Fact Tree. These are all supposed to be factual but it gives them a little more structure.

J: Now did you model some of these with them?

I: I did.

J: Before they did this, or did you model this first one, what it looks like, together?

I: Yes, I think we did the first one together. I try to set it up so they have enough support. I'll say, "Let's see if we can find what the penguin looks like." And then I'll read, and what I read said the penguin was chubby and tall. One child said that's what they look like. So I say, "OK, let's write it and draw it." And then I did it for them. And the others they did at their groups, at their tables.

J: Tell us about this next group

I: I did Fact Tree with a video. We've only done it with books, we haven't done it with a video and I have a great video on penguins. It went really well. We watched it one time completely, because I've found when you use videos for research, just let them watch it one time through. Don't worry about writing anything, just watch it. Kind of like when we read books we do picture walks first to get our brains ready for the books. So I had them watch the video one time, and then we watched it again, and I would pause at certain spots and say, "Why don't you write a fact that you heard?". We did that on the carpet. It was whole group. They each had a clipboard and they each had their own.

J: So are there a couple of these that you could talk about of things they noticed from the video?

I: Let's see. You can see – if they're empty, they're already on our tree.

That looks like – there was a really good visual of the adult penguin feeding the baby penguin. So there's a good visual of that on the video, so that's what that is. (showing child's paper).

I: This says "penguins can swim." We didn't get as much writing when we watched the video; they're more drawing what they think. When we pull out the books, they feel a little more comfortable writing. They said penguins could swim, so that's what she wrote.

J: So it sounds like it's also important that you do pause and give them time to write, and then do they turn and talk about what they were doing?

I: I try to always do that structure so they have time to think, but then they have time to collaborate a little and then they have time to write. I try to do that so they aren't just jumping into doing it all by themselves.

MODEL

So then today you went to the Fact Tree with books. So talk about your Fact Tree, how you came up

with the idea and why you think it's a good thing to do for research.

I: Well I saw it in professional development, I saw a teacher somewhere in the state using a Fact Tree. I wish I knew who she was so I could give her credit, but I do love it. She didn't have a real tree. In the past, I've had a tree on the wall. This year I said I'm going to be brave and get a real tree. And they've really liked it. They've been real gentle. We've lost a few leaves in the process, but overall they've taken really good care of our tree. I just like the concept of research is finding facts and so the whole purpose is they find facts and put them on sticky notes and put them on our tree. And it makes it a Fact Tree.

GUIDED PRACTICE

J: So it seems like you use that turn and talk time very strategically, by listening to them and helping them shape their thinking so then you can share what is actually going to reinforce –

I: Right, and I try whenever I'm reading to have a sticky note of where I want to stop. I've looked at the book before and have a good idea where I want to guide their thinking, but I don't want to tell them word for word, here's a fact on this page. I more just stop strategically throughout the book. And I always put a sticky note, because if I don't, I'll read right on past it. So that's what I was trying to do; read a little bit and stop, and again hoping that what they get at is what I'm planning for them to get. But I don't tell them. I don't know if you noticed, but on the first page – we've done penguins for about a week, and they still haven't understood that penguins don't fly. We've read it, we've seen it in the video, and I just kept thinking, when are they going to get it that penguins don't fly. When we were doing the questions, I even tried putting a little inflection in my voice like, "Can penguins FLY?" and then when I read the book, it says penguins are birds but they can't fly, and I'm thinking, come on, somebody, hit it! But they didn't get it. But then when they went to their tables, somebody got it on their own. And I was, yes, that's a good example of where I could very easily have said it on the first day, but I was trying to give them enough support that they would find it on their own. But it's funny because the things you think they'll figure out really quickly, they're not as interesting to them, I guess.

J: And it seems like it's important to wait and let it develop, because it's going to be so much more meaningful to them if they find it on their own.

I: And that took a lot of practice, trying to figure out how to just be quiet and let them do their thing, and give them enough support that they will get it. But I was really excited today that somebody finally put that connection together.

TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

J: When you were doing this lesson today, in the early parts you were having some concerns about whether they were getting the difference between facts and questions.

I: I was a little concerned. We've done it before and they haven't struggled before, like yesterday when they were watching the video they didn't struggle at all with pulling facts from the video. Today they seemed more focused on, "I'm wondering this," or "I think this." That was great. I didn't want them to think that wasn't good, but it wasn't what we were getting at today. The whole point of today was for them to get facts. So I tried to still validate that they were coming up with wonderings, and questions and that was great, but we were trying to focus on facts. So at the beginning when I was modeling and they were turning and talking, I was really trying to get them there. And I was a little concerned because they didn't seem to be getting there. But I said, well that's OK, let's just see what they do when they go to their tables. But when they went to their tables, they all did a great job of finding facts. SO maybe the collaboration piece of it on the carpet when they were turning and talking, maybe

they were still sharing what they were wondering and what they think, but when they went to their tables, they were pulling out facts.

J: I kind of wonder too whether, you know how you said with the video, they watched it once and then went back, I wonder with the book, even though they've looked at the book once before, I wonder if just hearing it once is enough to actually catch enough of the information. Maybe you need to read it and read the little chunk again and see if they have a fact they can pull out from there. I thought it was really great that you didn't discount the other stuff either. You do want them to think, and they had some wonderful questions and inferences that they were making.

I: One thing I did try to do is if I heard somebody say a fact, I tried to make sure that's what I shared, so the children heard that language. She shared a fact and here's what she said. 10:34 Let's see if next time we turn and talk we can share facts too. I was trying to make sure that the ones I pulled out from that turn and talk time were ones that were facts, but I know I did some that weren't too so they could hear the comparison.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE 1

I: Some of them, when I was working with them, I saw on the page something on the page that we haven't heard, like that a baby penguin is called a chick – that's a term we hadn't used yet. So I said let me read this to you and I read it and it said something like a baby penguin is called a chick; a chick hatches from the egg, and they were like, "I didn't know that baby penguins were called chicks." So a few of them put on the tree that baby penguins are called chicks. So when I'm conferring, I'm listening to what they're saying and I'm also – Fact Tree is a time when you can draw their focus to the words and read it to them and see what they get out of it. We got a lot of good terminology out of it that we wouldn't have gotten if we kept it at the picture. But since I was there to read some of it, we got some good words, like chick, and piping or pipping, when they come out of the egg. So the little girl said, did you know that when they use their beak, it's called piping. That's something I read to her, because she was talking about the chick coming out of the egg, so I said, let's read this and see what we can get out of it.

J: And I think the fact that they're going back to these books that they've looked at already for different purposes, they did get a lot out of the pictures, and now they're seeing that you can get more additional things from the words, so it is helping them understand what this whole reading thing is about in a way.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE 2

J: You're helping them shape those facts as you're conferring with them at their tables, so are there a few that you could talk about?

I: This one- I was really fascinated with her pictures. She wrote words on the last one, and this one's on the tree, but this one is the penguin feeds the baby from its mouth, so she was drawing an arrow, she said the penguin feeds him and I love how she was using those arrows. And here she was saying that this is a seal and the penguin is trying to hide from the seal. I really love how she was illustrating her thinking. I thought it was really smart. She is a child who is capable of writing words and sentences, but this is how she chose to do it, and I thought it was great.

I: As long as they can explain to me what they put on these sticky notes, I'm happy. So this says "they slide." She found that in the book. They sit on the egg; they hold their eggs; and little penguins can be blue and she's talking about rock hopper penguins.

This is the little girl who was talking about the macaroni penguin, and I was a little skeptical, but she's right, there is a macaroni penguin. So that confirms my philosophy of whenever we're doing this type of research of validating everything they say, because I thought she was making it up, but she wasn't. I: Even at 5 years old they're capable of doing such great research that sometimes it even surprises us. J: But I did notice you usually say, let's see if we can find that in a book or confirm it in a book, because they do have wonderful imaginations too.

This little girl, I was really impressed, she wrote some great things – they live in Antarctica, the egg doesn't touch the freezing ice, they live in family groups, and she must have seen a penguin at the south pole.

I didn't get to talk with this one, but they've learned that penguins have feathers.

J: Actually, I did talk with her, and this is the feathers keep warm. On that page I read to her that the feathers keep the penguin warm, and then we looked at the word feathers in there and she wrote her own c w m (keep warm).

LESSON REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

J: Were there any overall understanding you came to out of what they did today – any thoughts about where they are in this research process?

I: I think they are doing a great job of doing this research. They are finding facts. I love how they can describe the facts to us, so that shows me that they are able to take a book and find a fact and explain it to the class. Hopefully as a result the rest of the class learns from it too.

J: You know the other thing I noticed during the share was what you said at first there were just a few kids who wanted to share, but after a while they all realized that they had something to share.

I: Can I have a turn? I loved that. Sure.

So my next step is to have them write more nonfiction books about what they're learning, so we will probably start working on that next in writing workshop.

J: So they'll write a little nonfiction book about what they learned about penguins? Great.

I: Yes, during writing workshop.

J: So then we're going to move on to the next phase in the research of them having their own animal.

I: They'll pick their own animal and they'll do research in the stations like we practiced with the penguins, and they'll do their own animals. That's always really fun.

J: Any other tips from today or thoughts?

I: I think a tip with this is just to be prepared, have your books ready, your sticky notes. When I was learning how to do this I think I got frustrated with trying to figure out how to organize all this. Once you figure out the organizational side of it, the learning is very natural, as long as you have it set up for it to take place.

J: So this works nicely, having it on the sheet this way, so then you can easily take them off and put them on

I: But it's not just a blank piece of paper where they stick them all over the place, so it has a little bit of organization to it.

J: Or it's not just straight on the clipboard, which is a mistake I think some people make at first. If it's just on the clipboard –

I: We tried it and it was just a mess, and then they can't really keep it straight, what was what. Just trying to simplify everything and make it kid-friendly.