

Teacher Commentary – Strategy: Asking Questions

Sample Lesson: From Questions to Answers

Grade 1, Melody Blackwell, Watkins Nance Elementary School, Richland One School District, Columbia, SC

Joanne Durham, Interviewer (I); Melody Blackwell, Teacher (T)

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Commentary LESSON INTRODUCTION	<p>I: Tell us a little bit first of all about your school, your students, your class</p> <p>T: We're basically 99% free and reduced lunch. All my students – well, it's half and half, I have 20 students, and out of my twenty students cut in half, 10 that are reading above grade level, and then I have 2 that are just right at first grade reading level.</p> <p>I: And the other half are beginning</p> <p>T: Beginning readers</p> <p>I: You said around C's or D's</p> <p>T: yes</p> <p>I: And this is Watkins Nance Elementary School, in Columbia, SC and it's first grade.</p> <p>T: yes</p> <p>I: So this lesson today, what was the focus of your lesson and how did it fit into what else you're doing?</p> <p>T: We started a unit of study where we started talking about informational text and we're talking about asking questions and answering questions. But today's lesson really focused on – they were asking questions, but then learning how to actually answer the questions by using the text.</p> <p>I: Which is a whole other level</p> <p>T: Um hum. Using the teacher's Comprehension Toolkit helped me a lot because it showed me where normally we'd just read the text and find the questions, but now actually using anchor charts that allow children a tool to use to help them guide their way to what kinds of questions to ask when they're using informational texts and using the text to point out those text features and how you can turn those text features into questions, for example, in the lesson, it had where you could use the heading, and actually having them not only say the heading, but turning that heading into a question. In addition to the headings, also allowing them to look at the captions, because those captions actually help them to generate questions. Not only that, but pictures generate questions.</p>
CONNECT AND ENGAGE	<p>I: Talk about some of what you tried to do at the very beginning to connect and engage them in the lesson.</p> <p>T: Actually finding something that they would be interested in, so finding an animal that they could be, "whoo" and want to learn more. When we did the beginning part, someone wanted to know "What do whales eat?" So I quickly wrote that one up so we could refer back to that when we got to that page. So setting the stage so that they can see that when we talked about it at the beginning they had questions, but not knowing that when they started reading, they were going to find the answers to them.</p>

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	<p>I: They did a lot of turning and talking, so talk about that, how they've learned to turn and talk, what you think that helps to do in the lesson, why you do that in the lesson.</p> <p>T: It helps them to get their minds to thinking about what they are actually doing, and learning from their peers of what they've learned, and it helps them to generate their own thoughts about what they're learning as well.</p> <p>I: It seems like it also gave them great opportunities to be actively involved, because there were a lot of things in that lesson, but they kept with it because they had those opportunities. Allowing them to do more turning and talking, that's what I've learned through doing my Comprehension Toolkit lessons, allowing them to turn and to generate those ideas, and not just making it focus back and forth teacher-student, but having a whole bunch of peer interactions with each other.</p>
MODELING	<p>I: So talk a little about the think alouds that you created and it seemed strategic in terms of trying to find think alouds to illustrate different things you wanted them to do. Talk a little bit about that.</p> <p>T: Well the first one with the modeling was actually just connecting them through the animal as well as the information and finding the text that allowed you to really get some information that they can say "wow". For example, when we talked about the weight of the animal, and how it compared it to twenty buses, and you saw the eyes like, "Wow." Or even the heart, and how the heart was the size of a small car. And allowing not only for me to write it, but also draw their reactions more so than just writing it, using pictures as well.</p> <p>And allowing them as I read, will I find something, the information to actually answer my question.</p> <p>I: And actually the chart that you used, your think alouds, really modeled each of those things</p> <p>T: Right</p> <p>I: that you were going to have them do. Even though, I don't think, they're not going to get all that right now, but you're laying the basis for it. And here you modeled your actual thinking as you went along, right?</p> <p>T: Right, and to have the questions over here, and seeing where the question, the answer is right beside it, and drawing that line so they can have that visual that this is the answer to this question.</p> <p>I: And that sometimes you don't get an answer.</p> <p>T: Right</p>

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<p>GUIDED PRACTICE</p>	<p>I: Did you make any adjustments as you went along about deciding how much modeling to do, how much guiding to do?</p> <p>T: I kind of went along with them. Actually when we did the first question, where it says, “What do they eat?” and having them to find it in the text, they found it really quickly. When we went to the second one, they kind of – it wasn’t very clear, it was harder question, so they had to really search for it.</p> <p>I: So as you were guiding them, you were seeing that they were catching on to how this was supposed work.</p> <p>T: Right.</p> <p>I: And you were having conversations to support them with that.</p> <p>T: And I think they actually really chimed in on the last one, when they said look for – sometimes when you don’t find it in one text, I referred to a different text where they could see the picture a little big bigger and it showed that you could see the baleen and that you could find the information in another source as well.</p> <p>I: And I think their realizing then that they weren’t disappointed if they couldn’t find the answer, that was important.</p> <p>I: It seemed like you had a good pulse on what they were going to be thinking about, like with the barnacles, they all asked, “What’s a barnacle?” which you wanted them to do</p> <p>T: Even baleen</p> <p>I: And the baleen, so your think alouds were able to catch the places and where you stopped for them to think where they really would authentically have those ideas.</p>
<p>INDEPENDENT PRACTICE: Preparation</p>	<p>I: Talk about the decision to have all the different kinds of animals for them to choose what animal they wanted to do, and choose from the books. What was some of your thinking about that?</p> <p>T: I kept in mind that I wanted to get a variety of books that were right for my students who were reading on level C as well as my students who were reading on an L, so I wanted to have a variety of levels for them to choose from. Some of them, my main objective was for them to work with partners, and I so where some of them wanted to have their own books. So just kind of going with the flow, not saying, “No, you need to work with a partner,” but allowing them to use their own judgment about what they wanted to do.</p> <p>I: I think that’s really important, because we can sometimes have it in our minds that we are going to do it a certain way, but then there’s not any reason they can’t do it their way if that works out better.</p> <p>T: And then that was good that I had the books because even if they were by themselves, they found something that was just right for them.</p> <p>I: Talk a little bit about your decision to write the directions like that and is finding a book something that you’ve done before?</p> <p>T: Here, making sure they understand what they’re supposed to do when they go back to their seat, and actually</p>

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	<p>seeing it more so than hearing it, because they can refer back to it as they are doing their assignment.</p> <p>T: Actually when we do sustained silent reading we allow the students to find books that are on their level, so they know that when they take a test it gives them their ZPD, their zone of proximity and they know what level they're supposed to be reading on to help them be better readers.</p> <p>I: OK</p> <p>T: So here, the "too easy" – letting them know you don't want to read easy books all the time because you're trying to gain knowledge and more information, and then allowing them to stick to the part that says, "Just Right Books" - books that are on their level where they can actually read and not stuck on a word all the time.</p>
SHARING	<p>I: Tell us about how you decided to share the way you did, and what you wanted to accomplish in the sharing, and what you think happened.</p> <p>T: Well that was one of the main things, I saw how two students had the same book and I wanted them to see whether one person and then the other person had something different, seeing that they got something different. I also wanted to see - well, they wanted to share, too, they were ready to tell all the new information they had learned, and also seeing that some of them had questions that they didn't answer, and they talked about how sometimes you're not going to find the answer in the text that they're reading, but they can always find the answer someplace else in a different text.</p> <p>I: Yes, I thought that was really helpful, so the kids that didn't find an answer didn't feel like they didn't do the right thing. They did the right thing, it just doesn't always work that way.</p> <p>I: I was impressed at they asked the question and they found the answer. I thought that sharing kind of consolidated the lesson in a nice way. Sometimes they don't realize they've learned to do something as well as they have until they see they're doing it and their friends are doing it.</p>
ANALYZING STUDENT WORK	<p>I: So let's take a look at some of the work that they did.</p> <p>T: This first person is Elijah and Elijah read a book about tigers. And his first question was what is a tiger. And he wanted to go and put his answer down where the question was, but when I started conferencing with him and showing him how to remember how we draw the line and the question goes right beside it, he was able to put it on this side, and see that, oh, tigers are big cats. Then here he went down to "what do they eat?" and he quickly as he looked at the text, he decided to use not only the headings, but he went straight to the Table of Contents to find what he was looking for. So that gave me a clue that he knows how to use a Table of Contents and how to refer to that heading to find his answer.</p>

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	<p>T: His question was, “Where do bats live?” So he also referred back to – actually, we were flipping pages and I was going to the end of it, and he said, no, it’s back here at the beginning, so he knew exactly where to find the information, he just hadn’t written the answer yet. So he went back to it and then I had him read it, and he said, “Oh, they live in caves, they live in caves.” So that was good. I knew he had actually read it, he just hadn’t written it yet.</p> <p>I: I guess that’s a whole other thing, too, for them to begin to get this notion of not just finding this information and answering the question, but actually getting it down in some way or another. Some of them did draw, didn’t they?</p> <p>T: Right, “What do bats eat?” and instead of him – he did both, he added some more information as well, about the high-pitched noises.</p> <p>I: Yes, they learned that the bats make the high pitched noises to help them find the food</p> <p>T: Oh,</p> <p>I: because they can’t see in the dark. That was kind of interesting, because they read the words, but they had to have a little conversation before it made any kind of sense to them, and then they kept looking for what they ate.</p> <p>I: This was one of the little boys whose reading on a Level E, and when he was reading about the sting-rays, it was interesting to me that , first of all, when he looked at this picture he said, “Oh, stingrays camouflage” and that was an example of something that wasn’t a question but it was new learning that he had that was very cool because he made an inference there about what was going on, and then on this one, he was struck by the long tail and so he had question about why do they have such a long tail. And then in the text it says, “Stingrays have long tails. Their tails can sting.” So he was able to put together that in fact from the picture he had the question, from the text he could come up with the answer that they sting. And so he wrote it here – Question – long tails – Their tails can sting and then he did draw some of the picture as well. Which I think at this level is helpful for them to keep thinking through it. So they could learn at a lot of different levels in this lesson.</p>
<p>FINAL REFLECTIONS</p>	<p>I: Did anything surprise you or puzzle you today about what the kids did?</p> <p>T: Actually, they started talking about it at the very beginning, when I asked what are your thoughts about this picture, immediately I heard somebody say, “Don’t they have blowholes?” and I was wow, they had some knowledge of whales that I think helped them generate questions so quickly about whales.</p> <p>I: Anything you would do differently next time?</p> <p>T: I guess I would probably wouldn’t have as long of a text, but make it kind of short, and not as long, the timing , the length of the book I should say.</p> <p>I: And you didn’t read the whole book, so that was, certainly you wouldn’t want to read the whole book. And you might think about going back now that you’ve given them this overview, about pulling out specific ones of these, like just the captions and headings,</p>

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	<p>T: Right, I: And how to turn that into questions, now that they have the big picture, or just how we learn from the pictures, or how we infer from something, take it apart.</p> <p>I: Any organizational tips for teachers about – this is a challenging way to teach because you are really responding to the kids and where they are taking you, so any tips about organizing the whole thing that are helpful?</p> <p>T: Plan for misconceptions, what do you think they are going to have problems with, or misunderstandings about, so how you are going to guide that instruction, so for example, the baleen, have another source right there. So just planning for those moments of misconceptions. And also creating charts that are going to help you guide yourself through the lesson itself beforehand. And planning your books, even having books on the same topics at different tables so that they can come together and say, oh, I learned this about a book, well I learned this about a book, the same book, but different information.</p> <p>I: Where might you go with this now, in terms of how they were learning to answer their questions. What do you think you might want to do next after seeing there are some kids who are still getting the concept of you have a question, you can find answers to it, some kids have that, some kids are starting to ask more complicated questions, what are you thinking you might want to do with this?</p> <p>T: I'll continue doing the same types of things, but doing a different animal, and doing it in small group, allowing them to work at it together as opposed to the whole crowd, giving it a smaller group, and doing the exact same lesson because that was very beneficial for them to learn how to ask the question and then finding the answer. I think just a smaller group will guide the students who were struggling a little bit with that.</p> <p>I: And because this is something that takes a long time to do, right, it's not something that you learn in one lesson, so that makes a lot of sense, that you take it into small group where you can really reinforce it and help them out.</p>