

Strategy: Monitoring Comprehension
Sample Lesson: Monitoring Our Thinking
Kindergarten, Irby DuBose, Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

TEACHER COMMENTARY TRANSCRIPT

Joanne Durham, Interviewer (I); Irby DuBose, Teacher (T)

LESSON INTRODUCTION

I: Thank you so much Irby for your wonderful lesson with your wonderful students. Tell us a little about your school and your kids.

T: I have 24 children. We're Pate Elementary, kindergarten. We have many more girls than boys. We have about 15 girls and the rest are boys. They all have free lunch this year

T: We have a very diverse group, lots of different interests, lots of different backgrounds, it's a fun environment to teach in.

I: Talk to us about the focus of what your lesson is today, and why you chose it, how it fits in with where you are with these kindergarteners in November

T: Today I really wanted to focus on thinking, and thinking while we read. As an adult reader, I think all the time while I read. And I have found with children, even with kindergarten children, if I'm very explicit in explaining to them the different types of thinking that I do as an adult reader, and that that's the same type of thinking that they should be doing as a little reader, I've found that when you expose them to that kind of terminology, that kind of thinking, then they get it. And when they get it, it really boosts their comprehension immensely. They understand the story better, and really that's the whole point of reading, I teach them to think, there are different types of thinking that we do, and the whole purpose is to understand. So the whole purpose of this lesson was to really stop, pay attention to our thinking, jot it down, share it with a partner.

I: And is that something that you would do over and over with them?

T: Absolutely. I've found that it is November, but this is something that we've been working on since August. Initially we just started with our thinking with the turn and talk, there was not much writing, just getting that procedure down, talking about your thinking, and then we brought the clipboards in and the post-its and we would just have one big post-it note. I don't know if you've seen those but they're amazing. They're huge post-it notes, so we would have one post-it note on the clipboard. And I'd say, now stop and write down what you're thinking. So we have gradually progressed from just turning and talking to now using 4 sticky notes. And as we progress throughout the year, we'll get more complex text, we'll apply this with nonfiction, fiction. As the text levels increase, my hope is that they really have this procedure down, so they can still monitor their thinking even as the level increases, if that makes sense.

I: Yes. Perfect. So how did you choose *Ira Sleeps Over*? Why did you use this book today?

T: I used it this one – well, for one, sleep overs are really a lot of fun, and I wasn't sure how many of the children had experienced

sleepovers, so I wanted to expose them to that kind of experience. We also read a weekend with Wendell, and they loved it. So I figured since they loved this, I'll just find a book that is kind of the same plot, with the sleepover, so that's why I chose that one.

And I love how this book exposes them to lots of different opportunities for lots of different types of thinking. They have opportunities to infer, to think what they think is going to happen, they have opportunities to remember if they've done something similar, they have opportunities to wonder and question. So I love how this book lends itself well to different types of thinking. It's a complex fictional story which I love. Even reading it as an adult, I found that I felt scared when he was reading the ghost story. So I said, well if I'm scared, surely my children will be feeling this too. I had different feelings when he wanted to take his bear and then he didn't want to take his bear, I was feeling all kinds of stuff when I read it, so I hoped if as an adult reader if I'm feeling things, I can guide my children towards that as well.

CONNECT AND ENGAGE

I: So the first segment in your lesson was this Connect and Engage when you reminded them about having read *The Weekend with Wendell* and showed them *Ira Sleeps Over* and you talked to them about how you were going to be focusing on what you were thinking and have them think about what they were thinking. Why do you think it's important to start with that kind of focus for them for the lesson?

T: It kind of gives them something to hook on, instead of just jumping into the lesson, it gets their thinking in the right place. So I like pulling in the book prior,

It kind of gets their thinking OK, I remember reading that, so they're perhaps thinking about what they were thinking when we read this, and I like to be clear and explicit what we're going to do, we're going to practice with paying attention to our thinking. With kindergarteners especially, I think if you are very explicit with them and very direct, and they know what is expected, then they'll do it. But also if you use that language with them whenever you're trying to get them engaged, then whenever they're in the lesson, they are more apt to use that terminology with one another as well, to say this is what I'm thinking, and that's really what we want them to know, is that if they're thinking, they're going to understand the story, if that makes sense. And that's why we practice the turn and talk as well.

I: So talk about how you have built their understanding of turning and talking.

T: Turning and talking is very important. We do interactive read alouds starting the first week of school and this whole procedure is something we start really early, so they're not shocked in November when I ask them to turn and talk, they've already got it. But I think children are very visual, so I like to have lots of signals and lots of anchor charts, so we just talk about how when I raise my hand it's their signal to really tune in and listen to what I'm saying so they know what to talk about, and when my hand's down, they turn their bodies and sit knee to knee.

T: These charts are constructed together, co-constructed, so as I find that they are comfortable with what they are doing, we start making charts about it. So I don't make the chart and say, "here's what you need to do," we do it and I say, "What did you notice?" and they'll say our eyes need to stay on our partner so I'll write it down. So all of these different processes are things that they notice themselves doing and then we add it to the chart. Because I don't think it's nearly so effective if I just make a chart and say, here's what you do, as if they notice what they're doing and add it to the chart. And then when they're finished turning and talking, we say, 1,2,3 – when I get to 3 they need to be ready and back turned around. I think they are very visual and at this stage they need little signals.

I: So did they go to the rug and sit with a certain person?

T: They have spots on the rug. I try to minimize opportunities where no learning takes place. So I've found if I give them places to go, there isn't a lull where I have to make sure everyone has a partner. They have spots and then I assign them someone near their spot to turn to. But they are very flexible. If someone is absent, I say do you mind talking with this group today? I don't know if you noticed today there were a few groups of 3, and that was because the person's partner was absent so they went into another group. They do well with that.

T: I like to assign partners because there's no lag time, but we do switch them up. So if I find that a partner isn't really meshing with them, there really aren't rules, you can switch.

MODELING

I: So then you moved into modeling and starting to think aloud and you chose several places as you read the story to do your own thinking aloud and then gradually asking them to start to do theirs. Talk a little about why the think aloud is important, and then also – as you were looking at this point, how did you choose where you were going to stop and think aloud and have them turn and talk.

T: I think it's important to think aloud because again I want them to have a snapshot of what's going on in my brain, so they are more aware of when it's going on in their brain,

T: Really, even as an adult, sometimes that's difficult, to really slow down, and read a book, and pay attention to your thinking. So if as an adult it's difficult, then surely it's difficult for a child. So I'm as explicit as I can be, trying to make sure I'm telling them what I'm thinking so they have a better idea acknowledging and recognizing their own thinking. And whenever I was choosing spots in this book to stop and think aloud – I really just read it through one time, in a quiet place so I could pay attention to my thinking, and I put little sticky notes where I noticed something going on – was I feeling something, wondering something, thinking something was going to happen, and I marked it. I'm sure you noticed that when I read the book, I make sure to have them marked, so when I'm doing the read aloud, I want to make sure I'm as accurate as possible. One of the spots where I stopped was on page 15,

T: (continues) So I just stop where, like "I decided not to take my bear" – I was feeling stuff there, I was wondering there, so when I read it aloud, I would remember to stop.

I: And that was the kind of place also where they might be worried about him, or be wondering what was going to happen

T: Right, so my hope is that whenever I'm thinking and doing things while I'm reading, like you say, hopefully the children will be

<p>thinking things too, so that by stopping and acknowledging it, I'm hoping that's how they become more aware of their thinking.</p>
<p>I: And is there anything about the way you word your think-alouds, the language you try to use, that you could share? T: I try to say, "I'm wondering something here," and I'll say what I'm wondering or "I'm thinking something here," so the language I use is really the language I'm trying to get them comfortable with, so I'm trying to use it as often as possible so they get used to it and will use it themselves.</p>
<p>I: When they started to turn and talk, I couldn't hear them distinctly, but you could hear this, "I was thinking about" – you could hear that language coming out of many of them, so clearly they get the idea that that's what they are supposed to be doing. T: Good</p>
<p>I: I think also you consistently use that kind of language with them of, "would you mind if I shared your thinking, or would you mind" – it's very respectful towards them, which probably also helps them be so respectful towards each other. T: I try. I try really hard to respect them as learners. They teach me, I teach them, it's a 2-way street. But again, I think I help them to feel empowered whenever I give them choices, I try to make them feel that whatever they're thinking is really great, to use that kind of terminology to build their self-esteem.</p>
<p>I: And also you read fairly several pages of text between times that you stopped to think. Has that been something that you've played with over time to figure out? T: Absolutely. I find that if you stop too much and ask them to talk about their thinking, they really lose track of what's going on in the story.</p> <p>They lose track of their thinking. And that's something we've had to adjust. Like at the beginning of the year, we may have them turn and talk and only write once, because we don't want them to be so fixated on making something that they lose track of their thinking, which has also happened, they get so intent on making something really pretty on the sticky note that they lose track entirely of what they were thinking in the first place. So the amount of stops if something that we've had to work through, but it also depends on the text, there may only be one or two places where I think we need to stop, and sometimes there may be more, so it really depends on the text too.</p>
<p>GUIDED PRACTICE</p>
<p>I: So as you were listening to the kids, what are you thinking about as you are going around and conferring with them as they are turning and talking? T: Well that's when I have a really great opportunity there to see who is actually doing some really great thinking about what we were reading. There were some children who didn't really write anything, learners in my room are very broad, they range, so some of them didn't have much and I needed to work them through it, just – what are you thinking? Talk to me about it. And some of them I noticed would kind of listen to their partner first and then they write. Some of them when they turn say, "Tell me about your thinking" instead of just sharing, they just aren't there yet. They are more comfortable hearing somebody else, they need a little more support before they start and I think that is OK. At this point in kindergarten, I think that's OK. If they aren't comfortable yet</p>

going straight to the sticky note, that's OK. But I do think everybody put something, whether it was after hearing their partner talk, or they could go straight to their sticky note, or after talking with me for a little bit, because if I notice the child struggling or not writing anything, I try to beeline right to them and say, "What can I do to help you?, Let's talk about it a little bit." But they did really well with this story, I thought. I tried to pull people to share that I felt like were really showing the different types of thinking that I was wanting to showcase. You'll see that we have lots of reminds me and lots of feel, but I tried to make sure I had a little balance, each type of thinking was showcased. Now the wondering, you see that I was the only one really wondering, so as a teacher next time we could just focus on what are you wondering, what questions do you have, so that's somewhere we could go, to focus on their questions. They've got reminded, and feelings. They are reminded of stuff and they're feeling stuff. So these two – wondering and thinking – we'll hone in on them in our next read alouds.

I: So some of that time you're both supporting the kids while you're listening to the turn and talk, but you're also assessing what are the next steps, where are we going from here, what should I teach them next.

I: So one of the things that was obviously very key in your lesson was the whole turn and talk.

T: They love turn and talk. We do it throughout the day. They do it in writing workshop, sometimes we do it before independent reading, we do it for our inquiry studies. It's a great way for them to talk and feed off of each other. And I do think it helps them understand their thinking better.

Because sometimes they need to hear it from a child, and it's more effective when they hear it from a child. Like Haley, she used to not say a word, she wouldn't even tell us her name, and this whole turn and talk has really gotten her out of her shell. She's very confident, she wants to share, and I think it's amazing and a great testimony to this whole notion that if you have a child who's super shy and doesn't say much, if you give them a chance to talk to their peers, they'll get to where they want to share with the group, which I think is great.

10:39 T: One little girl kept saying, "My partner isn't listening to me". So I referred to the chart, our ears are supposed to be listening, and then I had a little conversation with the girl who wasn't listen, it's not fair to your partner if you don't listen to her, and why should she listen to you if you don't listen to her. That was wonderful I thought that she kept saying, "She's not listening to me." So sometimes they don't listen as well as they should because they love to talk, they all love to have their turn to talk, so we refer back to the chart, and sometimes we switch partners.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

I: So what kind of decisions did you have to make in terms of when the kids were going to go off on their own, how did you find what would be appropriate for them to do in this situation, and how did you support them to be able to do it.

T: When they went to their tables, I tried to make sure before they left that they knew it was OK to draw, to write words, to do a

combination of both. Some of my children are more comfortable drawing, some are more comfortable writing words and don't really like drawing pictures, some do a combination of both. So I try to make sure that they knew before they left that I really just wanted to see their thinking, however they wanted to show it to me, I just needed to see something. And for most of them, you really have to talk to them to see what they are doing, the writing by itself is great but if you don't have the child telling you the thinking, sometimes you're saying, let me think... But I just wanted them to know before they left that whatever they put on their paper, as long as it was their best, was great.

I: And tell us about those kids that chose to stay, how did you help some of them figure out what to write or draw.

T: One little girl, I don't remember how it got started, they couldn't quite organize what they wanted to do. One little girl was more doing a retelling and that's where I made sure to point out that it's great that we can retell the story, that we can remember details and put them in order, but that's not quite the same as what we're thinking, so let's talk about what you're thinking.

T: This little girl, she again was kind of stuck and so we talked on the rug, and when she went to her table, she said, this is Ira when he goes back home this is what he thinks is going to happen, he's going to tell his sister all about his time in the sleepover. When we shared at the end, what we talked about at the rug, was kind of that, but a little different. And she said, I made a little change, is that OK? And I said, absolutely, that's OK. So she's one who really just needed a little boost. And you see that she is very capable of thinking because when she did this, she came and said, "I changed it a little bit." The ones who stayed on the rug, I felt like one of them was stuck on a retelling, and I needed to move her but validate both, and the other two just needed to get their thoughts straight. They really had it, but sometimes they just need a little support and guidance.

I: I think it's very nice that they know whether they need help or not, they feel comfortable enough to stay and ask and didn't seem like they thought there was anything wrong with that at all.

T: I think it's great. And that structure of, "If you're not quite sure, just stay on the rug," we do that throughout the day. I think that's something that's important too. We do it in writing workshop, or read alouds, it's the same, this whole notion of if you don't know, it's OK. Even as an adult, I'm the first to say, I don't know a whole lot, but I'm trying, and I model that for them, there's things I don't know, but we can figure it out together. I think just – I approach things from the standpoint of I don't know all the answers, let's find out, so if you don't know an answer, it's OK, if you need help, it's OK, cause I need help too. That's what I'm trying to do.

I: And that probably bleeds over too in how they talk with their partners, they understand that their partner is there to help them figure things out as well.

SHARING AND CLOSURE

I: So tell us about what you wanted out of the sharing segment, and how you structured it, and why you structured it the way you did.

T: I asked them to sit on the rug in a circle. Anytime we share in the classroom, we're in a circle. We start our day in a circle, for morning meeting, and we end our day in a circle when we say goodbye. There's something about being in a circle that is very comforting, you can see everybody, I think it's respectful, and I get in the circle with them. I want them to feel as though I'm a part of

the circle too. So we came and we sat in a circle, we're very comfortable with that routine. I really wanted everybody to have an opportunity to share. In retrospect, they were getting kind of busy, and did everybody really need a turn to share – probably not. But I really wanted everybody to have an opportunity to share. But if we were to do it again, I may just ask a few people to share that I really thought demonstrated some thinking and the rest could turn and talk to share with a partner instead of going around the circle and having everybody share out.

I: And they know the routine of if they don't want to share, they just say no

T: "No, thank you." they know that. It was surprising to me because today a lot more wanted to share. Normally we have about half and half.

I: And you might do it that way some days, and do it another way a different day.

T: Yes, absolutely, keeps it interesting.

ANALYZING STUDENT WORK

I: So let's take a look at a little bit of what they did, as you're thinking about continuing to work with them, where you are going and what you're noticing from what they do.

T: J_____ is the one I noticed while she was thinking, she was doing some great – one of hers is up here. Her little pictures are very vivid, and for her to put that down that quickly I thought was that great.

I: And this one that you had her share was about the feelings

T: And look real close, there are little teddy bears with them, so she said they're happy because they got their teddy bears and they're sleeping. So I think this is a great example of she is very capable of writing sentences and words and stretching sentences and words but really I don't know if that was the most appropriate way to translate her thoughts here. I think these pictures do a really great job of showing us what she's thinking. Especially in kindergarten, they don't always have to write words. These pictures are great; they're very detailed, and you can really see what she's thinking.

I: And probably as she's drawing them, more thoughts are coming right, if she gets the opportunity, instead of just thinking about the letters and the sounds she's actually thinking about the book

T: And what she's thinking about the book. They'll get really hung up on making the letters perfect and the spacing perfect, so instead of bogging down their thinking with what the letters are supposed to look like and how it's spelled, you just take that away, and it's OK if you just want to draw pictures. You really get a good snapshot of what their thinking looks like.

I: And some of them are working with the letters and trying to figure out what all that is

T: Exactly. I'm excited because if I asked her to explain to me each of these she could do it, no problem.

But again I think it's just important to validate where they are as writers and as readers. It's OK if you want to write strands of letters, if you want to draw pictures, or use a combination of both. What's really important to me is that you're somehow putting on that paper something that makes you remember what you're thinking.

I: They all went at it immediately each time you gave them the opportunity to put it down, so I think that philosophy that you've

shared with them has made a difference. I don't think I saw any kids who just sat there, because they understand that they are able to communicate wherever they are. That's exciting.

T: I think so too.

I: Talk about these – you were saying something about.

T: Well M____, I was talking to her and she said that it made her think about a time she went to a sleep over and they had balloons and they put on a fashion show. Then I went to L____ who was her neighbor and L____ was kind of – had the same story, and they weren't at the same sleepover. So I'm thinking that L____ was more trying to write what M____ was writing, so instead of writing her own thinking, she was writing M____'s thinking. So as her teacher, when I'm conferencing with L____, trying to make sure that she puts on the paper what she thinks, not necessarily what her partner thinks, making sure she understands that what she thinks is appropriate, and right and good, so that's where I would go with that. And at this stage in kindergarten, this is going to happen. So rather than getting upset that they are copying, just going from there and working with L____ about how we can put our own thoughts on the paper.

I: So she would maybe be a target that you would get to quickly next time when they're working so that you could get to her before, so you could help her formulate her own thoughts

T: And she's one that I may just ask – L____ do you mind staying on the rug and I'll conference with you a little bit before you go, just to have an opportunity for her to talk with me about what she wants to write about. I may choose to do that as well.

I: And what a difference between that approach and berating the child for copying off of someone else. It's just a really different thing; you're using it as an assessment tool as opposed to

T: And I can imagine as a child until you're really familiar with it, it would be a little confusing, when we're using books and I'm telling you to get ideas and I'm telling you to talk to your partner so you can get ideas, so then when I go, why can't I just draw what my partner is drawing, I can imagine there would be a little bit of confusion there.

I: So this little boy I actually heard him talking and I thought it was really interesting with this two piece thing, because he was thinking about how the little boy was sad when he didn't have his teddy bear, and then how he was happy at the end when he got it. I thought that was so nice that he was drawing that contrast already between the two things.

T: Exactly

I: And if you were sharing in a way where you were choosing some children to share, you could even have a child like this share and say, "oh, that's interesting, you were thinking about the difference between one part of the story and another part of the story.

T: Z____ said it reminded him of a time when he went camping with his family and there were lots of stars in the sky. That detail I just love, that detail is wonderful that he is thinking such vivid thoughts and he can put them on paper.

T: This is a great one to show just how they mesh – she's drawing pictures and then she's got that invented spelling. This is sleepy (CPB) She felt sleepy. I always say you stretch it out, you write the sounds you hear, you read it back to me, and if they can read it back to me, then that's perfect.

LESSON REFLECTION

I: OK, just to wrap up a little bit, did anything surprise you or puzzle you about what they did today?

T: I was happy with how well the turn and talk went. I'm sure you could tell as the lesson progressed they were getting a little busier, and I think that's just a testament to kindergarten. But again if you don't expose them to this type of instruction, they don't have a chance to learn it.

T: I was really happy that I felt like when they were thinking that it was related to the text, because sometimes when we do these think alouds and they write, somebody says something that's really not – It started, I don't know if you noticed, but a little girl said I have a sister and I thought, OK, where are we going with this.

I: And you dealt with it I thought quite nicely – they pick up from your responses that when they are reminded of something that's not really that relevant, you acknowledge it but you move on, whereas the kids that you chose to share had more relevance to the story, it was bringing out some deeper thinking. So over time they probably pick up on the cues that you are sending.

T: One little boy really surprised me, at the end when we were sharing in a circle, he's very quiet and introverted, and I tried to contain my excitement, but I was having a party in my brain, because he said, "It reminds me of a time I went to a sleepover" and even something that simple from that child is just amazing. I was really surprised because he doesn't say much. And then when he said something, the language was perfect, "It reminds me of this"

I: this way that you are teaching, by focusing the kids on all these different kinds of thinking that they are doing to help them understand the story, it's a little different from the traditional – do a little vocabulary, ask them a bunch of questions about their reading. How did you begin to teach that way, and why do you think it's important?

T: I'm a firm believer in empowering my children and making them feel validated in whatever part of the learning process they are in. And I feel as though if I stand in front of them and just feed information to them, I'm not empowering them to do anything. I want them to be independent learners and independent thinkers, and I find that if you provide them with a space where they feel safe, where they feel supported, if you provide good, good texts, where they can really put themselves in the story and have lots of different thoughts, then they feel as though they can do it. I've read lots of Stephanie Harvey's books, I know she does a lot of this kind of stuff. We use The Comprehension Toolkit so I get lots of inspiration from researchers like her, where it's not "here's what I want you to know", it's you tell me what you are wondering and we'll go from there.

My children are beginning of the year kindergarten children, very diverse, but I feel as though if I don't expose them to this kind of environment, if I don't give them the opportunity to come up with their own thoughts, if I don't validate them and empower them at this stage, then I feel like I am doing them a disservice as a teacher. I need to provide them with opportunities to become the learner that they are, not the learner that I think they should be, but rather promoting what gifts they have, what talents they have, and I think this is the way you do it.

I: Are there any things that you're working on trying to do better in this kind of work?

T: there's a lot for me to work on. As an educator, a teacher, I'm in this constant state of reflection, what could I do better – what did I do good and what could I do better. So with this kind of thing, so I'm always trying to monitor the language I use and make sure it is appropriate for my children, but language that also aligns to current research and best practice. Even now after this lesson, I'm always filled with ideas of maybe we shouldn't have done so many turn and talks, maybe we shouldn't have tried to write so much, maybe everybody shouldn't have shared at the end, so I say, maybe we'll try that differently next time and we'll try it and see what happens. I'm always looking for great books that demonstrate different types of thinking. They're hard to find and easy to find, you have to really read them from a reader's perspective, and try to hone in on my inner reader, so the children can do it with themselves, but I have lots of learning to do.

I: I think I can see how also you learn as you do these lessons to take them to more complex thinking. How to help them from just what it reminds them of to those inferences or the questions that might be a little deeper and how your own think alouds can lead them to go in that direction. Like when you left them at the cliff hanger of whether he was going to go get the teddy bear or not, that was a great place for them to stop and turn and talk because there were so many things they could be thinking about.

I: Any other thoughts that might help teachers who are either thinking about how we move kindergarteners along or how we move kids along this comprehension journey?

T: First I think it's really important, I love this type of teaching and I think I have a heart for it and my hope is that my children pick up on it. I think that's important, having a love for this whole notion of discovery and promoting an environment that promotes wondering among your children. I think it's also super important to know your learners, because I think this philosophy is one that I've had since I've started, and every year it's a little different because every year my children are a little different.

I think this type of teaching is challenging but I think the results are amazing. They are much more authentic and the things I'm asking my children to do are more realistic, things they are going to have to do in real life, things that I do as an adult, just modified for a child. And I think that's the whole purpose of school, that we get them ready to be productive citizens, and it's important that we teach them these kinds of skills so they can do that.