

Teacher Commentary – Strategy: Building and Using Schema

Sample Lesson: Notice New Learning

Grade 2, Apryl Whitman, Teacher, Arden Elementary School, Richland One School District, Columbia, SC

Joanne Durham, Interviewer (I); Apryl Whitman, Teacher (T)

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LESSON INTRODUCTION	<p>I: Thank you, Apryl, so much for sharing your wonderful children and your wonderful teaching with all of us. Tell us a little bit first of all, orient us to your class.</p> <p>T: We are a small urban school located here in Columbia, very small tight knit community. We are 98% free and reduced lunch. In my classroom I have 19 students this year which is an awesome number to have. I do have 3 ESOL, English as their second language. Here we are considered an ESOL hub, so we have a lot of children who speak English as their second language here at our school. So that's something that I'm very cognizant and aware of in my lessons.</p> <p>I: And this is second grade, right?</p> <p>T: Second grade.</p> <p>I: And this is November.</p> <p>T: It's November, it's the second 9 weeks</p> <p>I: The lesson that you taught today, noticing your new learning, talk about how it's situated in what you're doing and how it's situated in what you're doing.</p> <p>T: I really wanted my children to hone into that voice that they hear inside their head and model out what I'm thinking so they can see me as a reader along with them, and not just someone as a teacher asking them questions. They're learning things all the time but they're struggling with taking that new learning in here and transferring it down to a piece of paper so that other people can see that new learning. Just being aware of that inner voice, and those aha moments, and those wow moments, that that's learning, and then adding that to that background knowledge and our schema is growing as we're learning, so we're just taking new information and transferring it onto these wonderful sticky notes.</p> <p>I: And the topic also tied into what you're doing in science?</p> <p>T: I always try to integrate – we have to as teacher integrate because time is precious so our science unit right now is solids and liquids, and we just started it, it's very fresh, so I wanted to find some things that we could talk about liquids and solids and make that connection and we're going to continue doing that. The volcanoes – I was looking and not only was it a really cool book because of the pictures, with explosions, and things on fire, but you've got liquids turning into solids, and you've got gas, so some of the texts that I chose, ketchup, and milk to ice cream, involved the changing matter and that's something that we're going to continue talking about in science so I reference back to this lesson.</p> <p>I: So how did you pick the particular book, the volcano book?</p> <p>T: Well, I thought of solids and liquids, I sat there thinking, what book can I read that has solids and liquids, and that isn't your ordinary content book, your kind of boring, drab, oh here's a picture of a solid, here's a picture of a liquid, I wanted to make that real world connection and so I literally stumbled upon a volcano book in my classroom and I thought, You know what, this is neat, this is really cool, this is going to grab my children's attention and get them talking. It was just very interesting and very engaging and the features in it were fantastic, diagrams, captions, labels, headings, those are all the</p>

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	<p>things that we're learning to gain new information from.</p> <p>I: So in your lesson you're not only teaching them- you were clear that you not only want them to learn from the words, but from all the text features</p> <p>T: From everything else, especially that's beneficial to my children who are beginning readers, who when they get a text that might be too difficult for them, they can still learn from it, they can gain that knowledge from the diagrams and illustrations and photographs as well.</p> <p>I: So the way you taught this lesson, with modeling it, and having the kids turn and talk, and come up with noticing when they learn something new, that's kind of different from the traditional, build background knowledge, read the text, answer teacher's questions – how did you come to teach that way, and why do you teach that way?</p> <p>T: Well, about a year and a half ago I had the amazing privilege of working with my district and my English Language Arts Department in helping writing curriculum and they brought to us the Toolkit – the Comprehension Toolkit. And I had the honor – Stephanie Harvey came in herself and gave us some training and you gave us some training, and I immediately fell in love with it, when I saw the videos of the children interacting and the engagement and the learning and I said this is it, this is good teaching. I wanted to join that wagon. Last year was my really first full year of implementation of using the Toolkit. I had some bumps in the road, I had to learn some different things, I watched a lot of videos, the CD that came on there, and other teachers teaching but I really just – it was trial and error with them, but I saw results. I saw children actually engaged in the learning. They were transferring the learning into stations. I'd walk over and they had sticky notes out and they were leaving tracks of their thinking without me over there. And when I saw that learning, I said, this is it. This is a great strategy to use and resource to use to teach it. So I had some more resources and some more training over the summer and continuing to use it this year full force. I saw other teachers using it and heard their reaction, and it's just a great way to engage the children and it produces results.</p>
<p>CONNECT AND ENGAGE</p>	<p>I: So in the Connect and Engage, the beginning part of your lesson, you try to set the stage. So talk about some of the things you had to think about to do that.</p> <p>T: Well, one, how was I going to excite them. They're little children, they want to be engaged, they want to be excited about learning, you have to make it exciting for them. That first picture on the front – really getting them excited about that. But then, making them accountable for their learning – this is about you, you're going to help in this process, and also, what do you already know. They're experts, they already know a lot of information, so pulling that background knowledge from them first and getting them to turn and talk immediately and make that engagement from the start of the lesson, I think that sets a positive tone for what's to come the rest of the time. It already gets them hooked, it gets them engaged for what's to come.</p> <p>I: And I noticed that you were very supportive – you were very clear that your background knowledge – some people have more than others and it's so exciting that we'll get to learn more – It's not that you have to know stuff before you start, but also they could share with each other and learn from each other.</p> <p>T: The one little fellow in the front says, "well, I just don't know anything" but that's OK, that's why we're here at school.</p> <p>I: Yes, your reaction was, "Oh, wow, you're going to learn so much."</p> <p>T: And that's just fine and sometimes they're a little tender hearted and they get upset if they don't know as much as the other person, but we have to remember that's why we're here at school to learn from each other and that's fine.</p> <p>I: And they made all those wonderful connections between the</p> <p>T: The video, the movies</p>

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	<p>I: Making the experiments, T: It was.</p> <p>I: Talk a little bit about your anchor charts and how you used them. T: This one was something really specific for this lesson, reminding them of what the purpose of the lesson was and that good readers are thinking when they're reading, and they recognize that when they are reading, and that's just a positive reinforcement. I was really excited, we had been talking about background knowledge so when they saw this, they really honed in on what that was, that it's information we already know and that's important that we bring to the table what we already know and it's going to grow as we read. So this is something I'll leave in the room and probably put in the library so when they're there without me, they can look to this chart and think, Oh, I need to be thinking while I'm reading and I can track. I leave sticky notes there all over the classroom, so wherever they are, whatever time of day, they have an opportunity to leave tracks of their thinking and continue doing what we did in this lesson.</p>
MODELING	<p>I: You really put a lot of emphasis on thinking aloud and showing them your own thinking. Can you talk even specifically – first of all why you do that, and then, within this book, how did you choose the places where you wanted to think aloud? T: The first thing is the students have to see me as a reader, that we're in this process together, and that I'm not that teacher telling them how to read, they need to see a reader, they have to almost be taught how to think and how to take that thinking and record it. So me modeling what is going on in my head is a model for them to see what they need to be doing, to pay attention to oh yeah, I do the same thing in my head, just like Ms. Whitman does, I'm doing the same thing she's doing and she says that's a good reader. So they're making that connection. So thinking aloud is very vital to show them an example of what good readers do. And what I do with any text and also with this, is I go through it, and I almost put on the mind set of a young reader, and what is something that's cool, that's really interesting, I don't think they're going to know that, so I'm going to say I don't know that. Also important key facts, you know that that magma was a liquid, that's something I wanted them to remember and pay attention to, and incorporating into my science lesson, so when I saw that in the text, I thought, oh, I need to do that as a think aloud because I want them to really pay attention to that. So it's a combination of both things I really want them to hone in on and things that I as a reader really thought were cool myself. I: And I also noticed that you really made sure you showed them how you could learn from the pictures, the headings, T: Yes, all the features. A lot of times, with nonfiction books they will go through and just read the print. And are skipping over so many cool things. Nonfiction text is full of so much information in other formats besides just the print. So really in second grade they are learning how to hone in on all those other features.</p>
GUIDED PRACTICE	<p>I: When you planned the lesson, I'm sure you decided, this is how much I'll model, and then the guided – did you do what you expected to do, and how do you gauge when – T: Yes. I think it was – the time line was a little bit longer than I expected, but one, we've done this before so this isn't their first time, if it had been their first time I might have modeled a little longer. But with any child I try to keep it short and sweet, those attention spans are very small, and I could tell they were antsy and ready to go. They were already jotting down notes as I rotated through the turning and talking, I could see that they were writing stuff down and really grabbing that concept of</p>

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	writing down my reaction and writing down what I learned, so they had gotten what I was modeling so it was time to let them go and practice. It's just kind of a feel for where they're at and what I saw when I rotated around.
<p>COLLABORATIVE OR INDEPENDENT PRACTICE</p>	<p>I: When you moved from the guided to the independent work, talk about how you chose the books that you had out there, and also about your partners.</p> <p>T: Books – I just really used my library and the local library and tried to find engaging text that was appropriate for them on their reading level. There are different abilities in my classroom and again I was looking for that underlying connection to solids and liquids, so I got the pizza one that went from mixing to freezing, to changing from liquids to solids, same thing with the ketchup and the milk to ice cream. Then I did pick a couple of volcano books because I knew some of them were going to be really excited about that, and they wanted to continue learning so I chose some volcano books as well, but they're all on their age level, appropriate for their reading abilities.</p> <p>I: And then how did you have the partners arranged?</p> <p>T: Well, honestly, it's a mixture, it kind of depends on their mood that day and how well they're working together. The partners that they had today were the partners they had yesterday for an assignment, and I felt like they worked well together. It wasn't necessarily that one child was high and the other a beginning reader, it was just that they work well together and I saw that they helped and assisted each other. Sometimes I do that and sometimes I select them myself and sometimes I'll let them select, and make them accountable for their own decisions. It's really a toss –up.</p> <p>I: And it helps to do it different ways at different times, right?</p> <p>T: Yes, to see different characteristics and different personalities together and how they can help each other.</p> <p>I: And as you're conferring with them, I noticed that you got to a lot of different people different times, but you spent good chunks of time with the kids you were with. What kinds of things are you looking for kids doing as you're conferring with them?</p> <p>T: I'm looking for what they were recording. I was seeing if it was in their own words, if they had interpreted the information or summarized in their own way, or if they were just copying straight from the book, so that sort of gauges where they're at with their comprehension. I was looking to see if they were drawing and labeling or if they were just drawing simple drawings, and some of the things that are down here, they took what they learned and not only did a writing but they drew it as well, and they labeled it, so they are taking little bits from different things and synthesizing it together. So that's what I'm looking for. And if I saw a kid who was struggling and didn't have a lot on their sticky notes, I would prompt them and guide them and model for them a little more to get them going again because that showed me, maybe they didn't get it in whole group and I need to help them a little bit more. It's kind of a combination of all of that.</p>

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<p>ANALYZING STUDENT WORK</p>	<p>I: As you analyze what they did, what are some of the things you saw and what are some of the things you learned about them in that process?</p> <p>T: I'm looking at this one right now, this was another little volcano book. He used one big sticky note. He has three different things that he learned. He took that volcanoes are dangerous because and he gave me the reason why – they can burn down buildings and cars. So he had to read and analyze that information and now put it together in his own thinking. This is what's really cool – Safety Tips – about a month ago we did a weather unit, and we had a safety tips poster out in the hall, how to stay safe from different weather. So he's written safety tips: Don't go by a volcano because it can hurt you. Safety tip 2: It can burn you. So he's taken something we've already learned and he's transferring it to this new learning, and that's just fantastic. I'll probably make him make a safety tip poster for this.</p> <p>T: The gentlemen who were working on the other volcano book, after they got done learning their new thoughts they drew their own diagram, so they really analyzed the information and turned it into their own. They labeled it, so they are really paying attention to those text features. And then he also answered his own question, that's what I thought was pretty cool. When we read, we're going to find the answers through some resource, whether it's the internet or a book. He wrote his question down, and recognized when he found the answer. So that was a great stride right there.</p> <p>T: Oh, the one with the picture, he had drawn his own picture. A lot of them, if they are beginning readers, and they can't exactly get the words down for their own thoughts, drawing those pictures to record their thinking is fantastic.</p> <p>I: And this is a second language child</p> <p>T: English learner, and a beginning writer, and instead of taking the time to just copy straight off the text, he puts it in his own thinking. He said, "I learned that these trucks are taking the ketchup to the schools," and that's pretty cool. He jotted that down and kept on going.</p> <p>T: The heart</p> <p>I: Yes,</p> <p>T: Oh, I love this comparison. He looked at it, and he says, this looks like a heart, but if it's in the center, and you think of it as pumping the lava, I think the magma chamber is the heart of the volcano. I said, wow. That's really cool. We're really engaged into this learning, taking so many things and putting it together. That's fantastic.</p> <p>I: And this is the sort of thing that you wouldn't ever get if you were just coming up with teacher questions. That's so much more creative and more developed.</p> <p>T: Those comprehension questions? No –</p> <p>I: You'd never get that</p> <p>T: You're not going to get the comparison that a magma chamber looks like a heart. That's a great comparison.</p> <p>I: So you saw them doing so many different things, and obviously kids are at different levels, so what kind of information does this give you about where they need to go or where you'll go with them next in that process?</p> <p>T: I think for me, since I am seeing quite a few levels – I'm seeing comparisons between hearts and magma chambers, and I'm seeing drawings, I really want to spend more time with this strategy, pulling in that information and recognizing when we see it in small groups. I do guided reading every day, and so being able to work with just a few at their own levels, and</p>

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	<p>guiding them through would probably be my next step. They started already asking their own questions, and writing those down and finding the answers to their questions, so that would probably be next in my whole group lessons, working with the book of asking questions and then finding those answers, because I think they are ready to begin that process.</p> <p>I: And that makes a lot of sense about what you're saying about taking it and continuing it, this isn't something that kids get in one lesson or two lessons</p> <p>T: This is all year</p> <p>I: this is sort of life. You're going to keep doing this in college</p> <p>T: And as an adult, and I showed them that I bring in my teachers' books and say, hey, I'm doing the same thing you're doing. So they see me as a reader, but this will be done in small group, definitely.</p>
SHARING	<p>I: What were your goals in the sharing, why did you structure it the way you did?</p> <p>T: That's something that I'm still working on as a teacher. Every child is so excited and I really want to value what they've learned and give them the opportunity in that time, but that takes time. So actually today was something I tried new to see how it would go, and I love them to turn and talk to someone new, so they did have the opportunity to share their new learning that they were excited about, and I rotated around to hear that. Then as I was out in independent practice, I really wanted to call on a few people for examples for something they had done as good readers. So I feel like that went pretty well today. It gave everyone the chance to share and then it showed a couple of examples of reading strategies. I really liked that today. I might have to try that again.</p> <p>T: Well, the accountable talk is just to anchor them with talking in ELA or math or any subject you need to communicate and share and learn from each other. Sometimes they need little sentence starters to remind them how to get going and how they can say and be accountable with their language, so any time we share we come back to a chart like this and we have another one for math, just so if you have a connection and you think of something, this is how I can start my sentence, or if I'm wondering something, this is how I can start my sentence. It just helps the reluctant sharer, someone who may not want to share because they're not quite sure how to share, this is something they can look at and help them. And that's any time we come to the carpet to share anything, not just reading, it can be writing, science, social studies.</p>
FINAL REFLECTIONS	<p>I: Did anything puzzle you or surprise you today?</p> <p>T: It surprised me that they knew so much already. It honestly did, about volcanoes. One, we don't have them around here. There are some on the news, someone said Hawaii, I'm always engaged and surprised with their learning, that they know so much, that their little minds are so full, so hearing that background knowledge was a surprise for me, that was awesome. And the synthesizing that J___ did, that I thought was really cool, how she took that and created her own representation of the information was little shock for me but a good shock. It was awesome.</p> <p>I: Any other clues you might have for other teachers about some of the organizational pieces that you've put together?</p> <p>T: I learned a lot last year. So I knew this year that I would start from the very beginning. Turn and talk was done the very first day. There's a turn and talk anchor chart in my room and we practice that every single day. And you can see that they</p>

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	<p>are still struggling with I don't want to talk to that particular person, so we're still working on that. Procedures and expectations have to be taught from the very beginning about how to share. As far as having materials readily available – a plethora of sticky notes, having the texts – making sure they're on level and engaging for children.</p> <p>T: Constantly review every day, this is what we're going to do, does everyone understand, let's practice turning and talking, having all that set up ahead of time helps the lesson go a little bit smoother.</p> <p>T: (showing the New Learning about Volcanoes chart) I like doing this after lessons because a lot of times they pose questions, or they'll post statements, and then later on, as they watch videos and read other books, they'll come back to it, and add answers to their questions, and add extra facts. So this will stay up for quite some time, and as they go on the computer, go to the library, if they learn new facts, they go on here, and it anchors their thoughts. So this lesson isn't done, it will keep going.</p> <p>I: One last thing, in terms of your own growth in doing this kind of work, are there things you're thinking about that you're trying to move forward?</p> <p>T: Oh, constantly. This is still a new way of teaching for me, I'm constantly looking at videos and other teachers and what they're doing to try to perfect my strategies. One thing I need to work on for myself is on management. They want to keep going and I don't want to stifle that, but sometimes we have to separate this into smaller chunks and just hone into each child's individual needs and where we need to go next is something I'm constantly working on.</p>