

Teacher Commentary: Focus on Fluency – Grade 2

Teacher: Christy Long, Inman Elementary School, Inman, SC (Spartanburg 1)

T: Christy Long, Inman Elementary School, Inman, SC

I: Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant - Interviewer

Before the Lesson

I: Thanks so much, Christy for your work with your kids. Tell us a little bit – we’re here at Inman Elementary, and this is second grade – just tell us about the reading levels in your classroom.

T: Our reading levels start at a Level A, and some are at a Level N. So we have a wide range of readers.

I: So when they came to you at the beginning of the year, there were some A’s, and they went all the way to N. OK. And now it’s the end of November, where are they now?

T: The lowest reader we have now is a D. We have several at the Ds, and we have 11 that are on level or below, and we have 10 that are above.

I: When do you incorporate the independent reading into your day?

T: This time that we have is a 45-minute block at the end of the day. I think that’s a good time to do it, because they get to rest, relax, and just enjoy the books.

I: And that includes – about how long for a mini-lesson usually?

T: As short as I can – When I’m planning my mini-lesson I try to find the quickest way to what I’m trying to get across and what I want to see them doing. I’ve used poetry a lot for that. And if it’s something we’re working on, I’ll bring it out in other times during the day. If it’s in their science lesson and I make a mistake in what I’m reading, and we just automatically go back and fix it, sometimes I’ll stop and say, “Wait, what just happened there?” and they’ll point it out. Yes, you have to always do that, not just when you’re just having independent reading time. Whenever you’re reading, if you’re reading a sign going down the road and it doesn’t make sense, read it again and things like that.

I: So you probably don’t spend more than about 10 minutes on your mini-lesson, right? And maybe 5-10 minutes at the end, sharing?

T: Uh-huh.

I: So then that leaves them 20 minutes or so to read.

I: So in terms of how you use your time, do you sometimes incorporate guided reading? How do you do that?

T: I try to be really flexible with it. Sometimes I will do guided reading groups while they are reading on their own, and then I try to go and meet with them as they are meeting with their partners, and listen to what they’re saying and not saying, and make my notes. I always have my sticky notes with me, and jot down everything I notice. Then I can point out the good things and the things we need to work on. You can find some of those things while they are talking with their partners. Then sometimes, maybe a week or two later, I’ll switch it up, and I’ll do conferring with them while they are reading, and then I might have a group as they go off with their partners. And some days I may just spend the whole time conferring.

I: So you really are playing it based on what you see that will be the most helpful at any particular time.

T: Uh-hmm.

Mini-Lesson: Part 1 – Engage

I: So the mini-lesson you did today, reading with expression, what made you decide to choose that?

T: I made up a google form that I am using on my I-Pad, and I can print up an overall classroom graph and it will tell me – here that they were doing choppy reading, and that’s where my class – I had the most that were doing choppy reading, so that’s where I went next. In the next few weeks, I’ll pull this up again, to see where

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they are, what habits they are doing, what they're using and what they're not using, to see where I need to go next.

I: So these were from your conferences with them that you decided that choppy reading was a big issue. Was this the first of fluency lessons, or had you done some others before this?

T: Just a couple.

I: So as you were developing the mini-lesson to deal with the choppy reading, what were some of the thoughts that you had that led you to what you actually did?

T: I was trying to think, OK, what is fluency? And it's paying attention to the punctuation, and changing their voices and things like that. So attending to the punctuation and if there's any kind of change in print, like bold words or all caps, and then I searched for a poem because that's short for a short mini-lesson to get the point across and leave them time to practice themselves. So I found the poem that had the question marks and that had the quotations.

I: And when you say you searched for one, what kind of resources did you use to find it?

T: I found the first poem in a teacher's book of poems, and the Traffic Light I found online.

Mini-Lesson Part 2 – Model and Guide

I: And then you set up the mini-lesson, so you modeled it first, and then brought the kids in. Talk about your thinking about the repetitions that you did with the poem.

T: For one thing, I wanted to read the poem to them so they all knew it and what it was supposed to sound like, and they understood this is Dad talking to the child, and what the child is thinking. So I wanted them to understand that instead of just jumping in and asking them to read it to me, because that would kind of lose the whole point of working on the fluency. The point was not figuring out the words, the point was the fluency. I wanted to model how not to do it, and then how to do it correctly, and then to have them practice with me. Then when we finished up the lesson, we tried it again. Since they have it in their book buckets, they can try it again hopefully on their own.

I: And there was a big difference between the first reading they did and the reading at the end of their independent reading time. I thought their expression and change of voices was much better, much stronger. And probably from all the conferring you did with them in their books, so it really did show a difference.

T: And hopefully it will start to show a difference when they're reading by themselves and in their heads.

I: And also I think that mini-lesson – did you refer back to it as you were conferring with the kids?

T: I did, with a few of them. L__, she was reading the traffic light poem, and so she immediately, when I pulled up next to her, she was already changing her voice. She kind of sang it in a sing-song voice. That's something we've been working on too, that poems have a rhythm and you can sing them.

I: Yes, I noticed when I was conferring with a few of the kids who were some of the earlier readers, when they would get to a question, they wouldn't necessarily lift their voice up, but I was able to refer back to your poem, and they definitely got it. So it seemed like that mini-lesson sets a lot of them up for really using that.

T: They just need lots of practice.

I: Oh, yes. But at least they have a reference point, and you know what their reference point is, so I thought that was very nicely done.

Independent Reading: Conference 1

I: So as you were conferring, so for example with this child, what are you trying to do as you are conferring?

T: Well, first of all, it kind of depends if they're in the middle of reading, or trying to figure out a word, or if I hear that they have a good rhythm going, I'll just sneak up and listen for a minute and not interrupt them. If they're in between pages, or if they look up when I come, then I'll start by having a conversation with them

about what are you reading and just see what they tell me. I may ask why did you choose this book? Just so I learn more about them as readers – what kinds of books do you like? You can learn a lot from them doing this conferring that you can't learn from doing reading groups or from whole group. So it just depends on what's happening as I scoot up to the child as to how I start the conversation.

T: after we talk about their book, and I'll take a quick running record with them, I can quickly see what the child is doing – is he doing a lot of rereading, things like that.

T: I'm going to look back at this and say, OK, what are these children doing? And you can get that from just a short running record. And that's a big aha I've had this year. You don't have to take a running record on a whole book to see are they using meaning, or using structure, or mostly visual, are they comprehending what they're reading. You don't have to do the whole book and take up the whole independent reading time to find out what one child is doing. You can figure out a lot by just a short running record. And you'll usually find a quick teaching point and a praise for them just from them reading just a short portion.

I: How did you choose the kids that you conferred with today? Do you keep any –

T: I actually have a list. I made this up to keep track by the week.

T: As I conference with them I put a check, and it's just the week of Nov. 14, the week of Nov. 21. That was the 2-day week before Thanksgiving, so there's not a lot there. It gives me an overall visual of who I've met with, and who I haven't met with. Of course I want to meet with the ones who struggle and need more guidance more often, so this gives me a week by week overall look, so I don't leave anyone out, and I make sure I get to the ones who need me the most.

Independent Reading: Conference 2

T: One thing that we've noticed as we've switched over from the Dominie Assessment Kits to the Fountas and Pinnell Assessment Kits, the comprehension is hard for them. The only question we ask in F&P is "tell me about the story you read," or "tell me what you learned from this book" and they have a really hard time doing that. So that's basically what I ask every time I walk up – "Tell me about what you're reading" and keep prompting until they tell me more and more.

I: Well that leaves a lot more room for them to be a part of the whole thing, not to just parrot back what the teacher asks.

T: What they want to tell me, and it helps me to learn more and more about them as to how they talk to me about the book. There may be some who walk me through the book and tell me what's happening on every page, and I try to pull them out of that to tell me in their own words.

That's a huge part of reading, comprehending what you're reading, because if you're not comprehending and you're not thinking, then you're going to make those mistakes and keep going.

I: And what's the point?

T: And if you're not doing that, the reading is pointless.

I: Exactly. And they're not going to remember it very well either.

T: And they're not going to enjoy it.

I: And they're not going to enjoy it at all.

Transition and Partner Sharing

I: And then this is the log that they fill out, with each day as they are reading.

T: And this is how I hold them accountable for are you actually reading during this time, if I'm not sitting with you. It's also a way to spiral back to the things we are doing in ELA, with the ELA skills. The first log that I gave them we just started with is this book too easy, too hard, or just right, because as I said, we had to go back and work on that for a while. So they had to write down the title, if was too easy, hard, or just right,

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and then if it was fiction or nonfiction. So it was easy for them at the beginning, and they didn't see it as a chore. And it just gets a little bit harder as we go, and that way they don't really notice that it's getting harder. We spent several weeks with finding the main idea of a story. Then when I felt that most of them had it under their belts, then I switched the response log from was it too easy, hard, or just right, to "What was the main idea of your story?" And all they had to do was jot down a few words. And then we went to the main character's name and character traits, and we spent several weeks talking about the character traits, how to find them and refer back to the text to prove that that really was a character trait. So this one that they're working on now just says, "What was the main character's name? And list two character traits."

I: So it's short and simple enough, but it provides accountability, and it gets them to think about those things that you've been working on.

I: So talk about the partner piece – why you include that, what you learn doing it, how it contributes –

T: OK. That also goes back to holding them accountable. When they meet up with a partner, the partner is going to expect them to talk about their book.

T: When we started doing read to someone, with a friend, they didn't really know how to talk about the book, so we backed up and spent a week or so just learning how to talk about a book.

I: What kinds of things did you do to teach them that?

T: Lots of modeling, and lots of practice. I gave them all sticky notes, and told them to write down any questions they had, their thoughts, and that would guide us in talking about the books, and then we would come together as a whole, in a circle, and try to do it all together, and I would try to foster those questions and show them how to add things to the story, make those connections, and how we spend time on your partner's book, because a lot of them wanted to listen to what the partner had to say and then immediately start talking about their book, so that was a big habit to break.

T: So we started with having them use their sticky notes to jot down what they wanted to talk with their partner about. And they would always take their sticky notes with them and talk with the partner from the sticky notes. So I told them that had trained their brain to think while they're reading, and to always be thinking ahead about what they want to share about their books. Then after we did that, they would turn in their sticky notes to me, and I would keep them on a page so I could get an overall idea of what the child is wanting to write about and talk about. Is he writing about author's purpose every day? If so, I'm going to encourage him next time I talk with him to talk about the characters, or what was the problem in the story, or what else could we share other than author's purpose? Things like that. And are they always reading nonfiction books? If so, next time we have our reading group, I'm going to do fiction books with that group. Things like that, to get an overall picture using those things. When they meet with their partner, that holds them accountable. I have them meet with the same partner all week and that also keeps them from talking about the same book every day, because if they got to choose a different partner, some of them would read the same book and would want to share the same thing every day.

I: That's a good thought!

T: You know, you learn as you go.

I: Of course, as they outsmart you, you figure out what to do

T: It's all about observing, continuously watching, what are they doing and why are they doing it, and what can I do to bump them on to the next level.

I: They seem to really enjoy that part.

T: They do. And they enjoy all of the independent reading time.

I: Oh, I didn't mean that they didn't enjoy the rest, but it added something

T: They look forward to talking with a friend

T: And then I brought the spinners, and they can use the spinner if they want to, to get them started, or they don't need to use the spinner. And we keep the anchor chart up that gives them things to talk about, and also keep the anchor chart up about how to talk to a partner about your book – how do you talk to someone,

how do you listen to them – you start with the title, you set your book down when you listen to your partner, just to show them that you care, and that what they’re saying means something to you and that way you can respond to them. So I keep all of those charts up so if we need to refer back to them, they’re there.

I: They’re there.

Sharing 2

I: So talk a little about the sharing – what were your goals and what do you think it accomplished?

T: With the sharing, they love that part too. They all want to share, but it’s hard to choose who shares, and I keep my sticky notes daily with who shares to be sure it’s not the same children. Some of them are a little more reluctant to share. We’re a family, and we want to learn from each other, so like when they make the mistakes, like leaving the “s” off of “apple,” we want to talk about that with each other, and praise her for going back and fixing it and what she’s going to do in the future. Because a lot of them do that, they don’t search through the end of the words. So if I see them doing something that I know would benefit the rest of the class, I say, “Would you mind sharing with the class?”

I: So you prepare them, while you’re conferring with them, that you are going to want them to share those things. And it was so nice, how the emphasis was on what you do when you come to difficulty, as opposed to – you made a mistake. They seemed to totally adopt that attitude.

Sharing 3 and Closing

I: Well also, it seemed like you did make sure that when you shared there were at least one or two kids who shared what you had done in the mini-lesson, right?

T: Yes, trying to bring it back. Especially with the last child. I tried to make sure that he was the one that I had asked to read with expression when he was reading the page with all the exclamation marks.

I: And he was such a fabulous example! It was great.

T: When you allow them to share like that, it boosts their confidence, and their friends are giving them thumbs up.

I: And with something like the fluency, it could be a level N or a D, and it wouldn’t really matter, it’s something they all need to work on, so that was nice.

I: And around the sharing also, you had the kids have the opportunity to ask each other questions. Why do you do that?

T: I think it validates what the child is sharing and it lets them know, hey we care about what you’re sharing. It doesn’t always have to come from me. Sometimes what I would want to say back to a child isn’t what they would say, so then I can hear their thinking, and a lot of times they bring up things that I didn’t even notice, and that’s a big celebration – I didn’t even think of that and they think they outsmarted the teacher. I just think it’s important for them to work together on these things and to show that we’re a family and we help each other out.

I: I was really impressed with some of the things they asked each other, because I thought it really reflected all those things that you’ve been trying to teach them, like when they would ask about the characters, or their questions about the story. So in a way you’re really developing comprehension without it being teacher questions, the right answer –

T: Right. It’s not just question and answer, question and answer, and sometimes that answer leads into a little bit of a discussion.

I: Yes, I thought that they really carried the ball, and there’s nothing better than when the kids are doing the work!

T: And then I’ll just observe, and take notes.

I: So what are you thinking for some of your future mini-lessons at this point now?

T: I'll continue with the fluency, and of course just thinking about what you're reading, always thinking about what you're reading and make sure that it makes sense. In our ELA study, we're working on cause and effect, so their next reader's response log, after we work on it for a few weeks, I try to make sure that they have it under their belts and really, truly understand what it is and how to do it, and then I'll put it on the reader's response – what was something that happened in the story and what caused it to happen? And try to connect it that way.