

TRANSCRIPT TEACHER COMMENTARY

Independent Reading Kindergarten: Make a Plan to Stay Engaged Irby DuBose, Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

Before the Lesson

I teach at Pate Elementary in Darlington SC. It's my 7th year teaching. I've been 6 years in 5K, 1 year in first grade. I have 24 students. We are Title I. We have zero ESOL. We have 2 kids who are reading below grade level, 3 above, and the rest are right there on grade level. It started they were all pretty much below grade level except for one or two. So they've really made some gains.

I think most of them definitely have more stamina. They are able to sit down for a longer stretch of time and stay engaged in a set of texts. I definitely think they are more aware of the strategies they are using while they read. The last time you came, they were doing strategies, but they weren't quite at the point where they could say, oh, I'm using the picture, or I'm rereading, or I need to stop because this doesn't make sense. Now they're a lot more verbal and more aware of what they're doing as readers and they can kind of describe it. At the same time, since they are reading for longer stretches of time, we've had to be creative in coming up with plans, like we did today, to help them stay engaged. Because the longer they read, the more likely they are to stray, which I think is natural.

Mini-Lesson Part 1 – Introduction

We've been really working on building stamina, and they've done a good job with that. But on the flip side, I've noticed they were starting to stray, some of them, even if I made sure they had a good assortment of just right books and look books, books they were interested in, but maybe it's just that time of the year, they kind of needed to be reminded, when we go to independent reading, it's important we stay engaged. One way to stay engaged is to set a goal. That's one thing we've talked about since the beginning of the year. Independent readers set goals. One goal is making a plan. I think that makes sense. If you make a plan, that plan is your goal, working towards that goal will help to keep you engaged.

Their definition of coming up with a plan, is like today – they divided up their books into just right books and look books. So we talked about how your plan is, you're going to read your just right books first, and your look books second. The whole point of that is so they, one, see I have this group I need to read through, and I need to read my just right books first because that lets me practice my strategies and then I can do my look books. I know as an adult I'm a planner, if I know what my plan is, it's easier to achieve. So I try to figure out as an adult do I do that seems to help me, and then modifying it for children. So the plan was either reading just right books first and then look books, or reading favorite books last. The whole point is that they aren't just pulling books and putting them back, but having a plan and sticking to it.

Their goal could be to stay engaged, that's the big one with making a plan. And then if they read their just right books first – a lot of times during IR if you don't have them make a plan, they'll just look at their look books the whole time, and that's not helping them with any of their strategies. That's really not helping them become a more proficient reader. So if they read their just right books first, then they have chances to practice the strategies.

Independent Reading: Conference 1

I was really impressed with what the little boy who was sitting here – he’s kind of one of my struggling readers. But he was able to say, I’m making my just right books stack and my look book stack, and I’m reading my just right books first. And then we sat down and we read together. I was impressed with what he did. We meet every day during small groups, and I meet with him every day because he’s one of my struggling readers. It was refreshing to see him use the strategies we use in small group during IR. That’s really the whole point, during small groups, for me to give them strategies they can use when they’re by themselves. So that conference was really nice, because he’s getting what I’m teaching him and he’s doing it by himself.

I try to end each conference with a goal, like you did a great job doing this and this and this, so let’s keep working on this. So his goal I think was just to keep using the strategies he was doing.

Independent Reading: Conference 2

They all have really grown tremendously this year as readers. I think we’re still just working on finding really just right books. And I think that just takes practice. You can try to define it all you want, but it really just takes them getting the books and experiencing what just right is. They know they’re supposed to have their yellow folder with them, because the yellow folder is full of just right books.

I think conferring is hard because I sit down with them, I want to spend more time than I need to. You want to fix everything when you sit down with them, and I think I’m trying to learn to just pick one thing, focus on it, and move on. I can always come back to them tomorrow. But it’s hard because you want to really get deep with those conferences, but you just don’t always have time to get as deep as you’d like to and hit everybody that you want to hit. So probably one thing I could work on in conferences is knowing when to stop.

Sharing

My goal is for the reader to have an opportunity to talk about what they’re doing as a reader, because I think if you can describe what you’re doing as a reader, it helps you to do it better, so I think that’s a good depiction of how well you understand something is how well you can describe and explain it. So that’s the point from the reader’s perspective. And from the listener’s perspective, I think it’s just really effective to listen to a peer sharing what they do, as opposed to me modeling what I do as a reader. And I think it helps to build a community of readers, which is what we’re shooting for.

A lot of times they kind of get hooked on something they liked, and they like to say, “You used good fluency, I liked it because it helped me understand the story better, we know fluent readers. And what happens a lot of times is somebody will say something like that, and like Ms. McDonald and I will get really excited, because that’s a great comment – you used good fluency – and we’ll say, Wow, what a really interesting thing to say. And then the kids are like, oo, I’m going to say that next time. So I think just making sure – and we’re working on it – making sure you really listen to each reader, and really listen to what you liked about them reading, and then say that. I think today, because the camera was here, and they know we like that term fluency, they were all just saying it. Which is fine. We’re working on really listening to the reader and really focusing on what did they do that was good. And then a lot of them, I don’t know if you heard it, but 2 or 3 of them said, “you turned the pages nice and easy,” and

that's something they used to say at the beginning of kindergarten, and I was really surprised that they said that, because we said no more saying nice and easy; that's great, but there are so many more things that you can say that are I guess more – meatier. You can say much better things than you turned the pages well.

Reflection and Next Steps

I definitely think we're not done with making a plan, and distinguishing just right books and look books. I think with just right books we really need to revise – just because you can read most of the words, doesn't mean it's a just right book. Something else with just right books that we need to hit on that this other conference reminded me of is with just right books you have to be sure you have some background knowledge about whatever it is you're reading or you won't be able to figure out the words. So that's where we'll go next. And then I'm always looking for creative ways to help them stay engaged. So today a lot of them were doing a great job, but there were still some that weren't. So trying to figure out what the problem is – why aren't they staying engaged. And I always say if they're not staying engaged it's my fault – I haven't given them the right book, I haven't found the book that will help them enjoy the read. Just trying to figure out what can I do for these children that aren't staying as engaged as I'd like them to.

Each year my goals are the same – I want engaged, proficient, independent readers. Some of them stay engaged easier than others. Some of them have better stamina than others. So I guess it's just getting to know them as readers and what I do to meet their needs. I can tell you one thing that we don't do is pull lesson plans from previous years and say, last year it worked, let's do it this year. That's never the case. They're always different and something new they need. I think that's when conference notes, and really paying attention to what your children can do can really help you.