

Teacher Commentary: Early Meaning Making – Kindergarten

Teacher: Irby DuBose, Pate Elementary School, Darlington, SC

T: Irby DuBose,

I: Joanne Durham, Literacy Consultant - Interviewer

Before the Lesson: Part 1 - Introduction

I: So Irby, tell us a little bit about your class. We're here at Pate Elementary in Darlington.

T: Pate, in Darlington, and it's 22 beautiful kindergarteners.

I: I know it's December 1st of kindergarten. What is the span of reading levels?

T: We have a variety. We use the DRA 2. A good portion of the class is reading Level A. Some are at the next level, Level 1 and a few are not reading Level A.

We have a few that are really developed, and then we have a few who only know about 9 letters of the alphabet. We have a big span. But we always do. That's the good thing about kindergarten

T: I try to make sure they understand that when they come to me, it doesn't really matter what they can do. They're all readers, and I want them all to feel that and experience that. I want them all to know they're readers. Whether they can pick up a book and read every word, it doesn't matter, they're all readers. As the year progressed, I've definitely seen children develop more reading strategies, they're more confident I think, they're better at doing strategies I want them to do, like cross-checking and using pictures to support your thinking. We're working on strategies like building your fluency and visualizing and things like that. I've found that no matter what level they're on, they're all getting much better at using those strategies during independent reading.

I: And making a 1-1 match

T: Yes, tracking print, and things like that

I: And concept of print, even their book handling

T: Yes.

I: So is there anything that you find particularly challenging this year with moving them ahead in independent reading?

T: Each year we have a different set of challenges.

This year, and I don't think it's a bad thing so I hope it doesn't come across as a negative thing, they're very social. So I think trying to find the balance of when it's OK to talk during independent reading and when it's not OK to talk in IR, that's something we've really been focusing on, because I want them to talk, but I want them to know there's a time when they should really just focus in on themselves.

Before the Lesson: Part 2 – Time and Structure

I: How and when do you incorporate IR into your day?

T: We have it every day, it's a designated slot in our schedule for it. We set aside 30 minutes for it. Sometimes it takes the whole 30 minutes, sometimes it doesn't. They definitely aren't reading that whole time right now. On the stamina tree they're only at 10 minutes, which I think is perfectly appropriate for kindergarten at this point in the year. And then I find that when we set that time aside every day, the children know it's coming, they know when it's coming, and they come to expect it.

T: We always start with a mini-lesson, some kind of skill or strategy I've noticed the whole class could benefit from. I try not to be too specific with mini-lessons during IR. That's more for guided reading. I want to make sure that what I'm using that time for is going to be useful for the majority of the class. So we always have our mini-lesson, and then they do their reading, and I confer. I always love when I witness them taking what we did during the mini-lesson and actually applying it during IR. At

the end, the sharing, I always get a lot out of that time. I get a lot when I confer, but I get a lot when they share. There's something about hearing things from children's perspectives. It has a profound effect on the children sharing and on the children hearing it. So I always love that part. We always do those 3 parts – mini-lesson, conferring with the reading, and sharing at the end.

I: Have you done some work with not conferring during IR, doing guided reading groups during IR, or do you keep those things separate?

T: I keep them separate because especially at this time of the year, they're not reading for that long, so I wouldn't really have much time with my guided reading group. But also I want them to just sit there and read independently. We do guided reading during a different time of our day. We have a literacy station time and I hold groups then. We really keep the IR structure with the mini-lesson, conferring, and sharing. As their stamina increases, and they read for longer periods of time, then I conference with more people.

Mini-Lesson: Part 1 – Engage and Model

I: You reviewed a number of the procedures, right, like with the stamina chart, you'll keep doing that?

T: We'll keep doing it until we fill that trunk all the way up to 30 minutes, hopefully. I always say with stamina, we want a big goal, so they never feel like, well I made it to 15 minutes, so now I don't need to read any longer. So I want them to always have something to work towards.

I: So talk about today's mini-lesson, why you chose it and how you developed it.

T: Well I was a bit on the fence. I wasn't quite sure where to go with this group today. The past two days they've been showing me a lot of strategies that they're using. I'm really big on, when I see them doing something, I like to talk about it and name it. Today we talked about rereading, that was one of our strategies on our chart, because for the last two days I've seen a lot more rereading, which is great. So we've named it, we said this is rereading, this is what it looks like, this is what it sounds like. So I was on the fence as to whether to do a big mini-lesson on what rereading is, and go from there, or do the lesson I did today.

5:28 I chose the lesson I did today because I've been noticing – I've found with kindergarteners, once you start talking about the words, they forget about the pictures. So I thought well maybe today we'll just focus more on bringing it back to using the pictures, and they can read it from the pictures, and using the pictures to help you figure out the words.

I: And you chose the book, Parade by Donald Crews.

T: I chose that book because I think the illustrations are really great and the words are minimal so it was a good choice I think for having them recognize the pictures and make meaning from the pictures and then checking to see if it matched the words. I really just wanted them to pay attention to the pictures. And then we just had all the parades with Thanksgiving and Christmas is coming up, so I thought it would be a good, interesting book to do.

I: And then when you did the mini-lesson, you broke it down into some modeling and some guiding. Do you want to talk about that?

T: I find myself as a teacher I'll do that really throughout the day. I like to model, here's me, I'll show you what it looks like, now I want you to do it together, so they turn and talk, and now I want to read and I want you to do it by yourself. So that kind of gradual release I find that we do that throughout the day. We do a lot of turning and talking, and a lot of let me show you and now you try it. And I think that's been really successful with my children in helping them understand exactly what it is I want them to do.

I: Because first you're showing them, and then when they're doing it, you're able to hear what they've absorbed

T: Yes, where I need to go next. Are they getting it, or do I need to revisit something.

Mini-Lesson: Part 2 - Guide

I: what role do you see their peer to peer interactions in the mini-lessons and sharing play in their engagement or learning in IR?

T: I think it's always so good to get a chance to talk about something before they do it. It helps to hear somebody else's ideas and bounce ideas off somebody else. I think it's just a good support for them. I don't want to just throw them into the water and hope they swim. I want them to feel confident. I think that's a good way to build that confidence, to give them a chance to talk about it. And also for kindergarten, it's just a good chance for them to talk and know it's OK to talk. I don't want them to be quiet all the time. So having a designated talk time, having share time, they know they can talk during those times, just not during the actual reading time. find it really helps them understand better, hearing from another child's point of view, whatever we're talking about.

I: And then they're articulating their own thoughts, too, verbally.

T: Being able to articulate what they're doing, and to hear it from another child is really important.

Mini-Lesson: Part 4 – Transition to Independent Reading

T: We try to set up our time to maximize reading time and minimize transitions, like the table leaders are there because with kindergarten I find if you just let them go, to get their books out and their folders out, some of them do it quickly, and some of them it takes a little longer. So it just seems to work really well with the table leaders. They go, they get it ready, so when everybody goes they can get started. You don't have to be worried about being distracted by somebody who's not ready. When they get there, it's ready. And that lets my assistant and I not have to worry about doing that. We can worry about the class.

I: What do the table leaders actually do to set it up and clean it up?

T: They – I'll say table leaders go ahead and go. They'll get the books out from the book bags at their tables. The table leaders get them out and they have names on them. At the beginning of the year it's really fun to watch the table leaders, because you can see they're looking at the bag, looking at the name, and trying to find that name tag that it matches with. Now they're really good. That's so and so's bag and they put it where it belongs. They pass out the bags of books at the table. Then on the back of their chairs, we have folders that have familiar poems and familiar books in them and they get those folders out and put them out too. And it's pretty quick. They pass the books out and the folders out and the kids go and they have their materials ready .

I: Now they go off to the tables, and they have assigned seats at the tables. Do those change across the year?

T: Sometimes, it just depends. Sometimes the tables aren't working and we'll move some people. That just depends. As the year goes on, if I see some people at a table need to be adjusted, I will. Right now they're not really assigned by any kind of reading level or anything like that. There's definitely a mix at each table, which is what I like. I like for it to be a variety of readers.

Eventually, I haven't done it yet, but I like to give them fun spots. That's where they go and find a spot that they think would be more comfortable. You know everybody doesn't like to sit and read at a table, sometimes you like to read on the floor or stretch out. So eventually once they get a good handle on being engaged, we'll do fun spots. They'll pick a fun spot and I like to put their name on their fun spot around the classroom, and there will be days when they can go to their fun spot if they want to. That's kind of where we're headed.

Independent Reading: Conference 1

T: The first little boy I conference with was reading this book, People Who Help, and I noticed that he paused – and this is what he shared – he paused – he said, “He is a – hmm” and then he figured it out – a teacher. So as his teacher, I know he probably figured that out because he looked at the picture, but what I wanted to make sure he knew in that conference, I wanted him to be able to say, oh, I figured it out by looking at the picture, because I find if they can name what they do, they are more likely to do it again. So that’s what we talked about with him.

I: How about your records? What kind of records do you keep

T: I just write down notes, like this. I write their name and what I see them doing. It’s nothing fancy and nothing too difficult. It’s really just what do I see them doing, what did they tell me, what did I catch, and what do I want them to do, where do I want them to go next. I try to leave every conference with – I start with, here’s what you did well, here’s what we can work on, now I want you to work on that. So I try to leave them with some kind of step of what to work on. Then I like to transpose these and I have a notebook, and I rewrite them on a conference sheet in the notebook, a data conferencing notebook. That kind of gives me some processing time. So here are my little dash notes, but when I transpose it, that’s when I think, is this really the best thing.

Independent Reading: Conference 2

T: This little girl was reading the pictures and telling a wonderful story just from the pictures, but she was a little confused. She would say that it’s a just right book, and it’s not, it’s a look book for her. So I probably need with her and the rest of the class to reiterate what a just right book is and what a look book is

I: Being that this is a book where the words would be too hard

T: Right

I: Difficult for her right now, but she could tell the story from the pictures, but she needs to know the difference.

T: Right. I’m trying to make sure that I still place value on the fact that she was telling such a wonderful story. She was saying things like, the queen looked in the mirror, and the word mirror is right here –

I: That’s going to help her eventually

T: The concept of a just right book is kind of new to them. If you think about being a kindergarten reader, they have one line of text, so we’re teaching them what makes a just right book – it’s interesting, you can read most of the words, it’s a book that you like, things like that.

T: And then a look book, we talk about it’s a book that you’re still interested in, but you’re kind of just looking at the pictures and getting your comprehension, making meaning from the pictures. But in kindergarten that’s a really good skill that I like to teach them, because I don’t want them to neglect the pictures.

I: The other thing about the look books, the fact that she is telling the story, so she’s getting that story structure so nicely as she’s building comprehension

T: One thing I think is interesting is that this child in writing workshop will do the same thing. She’ll make really great pictures, and then when I say, read me what you’ve written, she has the most elaborate stories to go with her pictures, but she’s not writing the words yet. So I think that’s always interesting to see that connection between the way she’s reading and her writing.

Independent Reading: Conference 3

T: The next one I did was this one. And this little girl, I was really happy with what happened. She read the book and she was doing a really good job with tracking print and had great 1-1 and she read

all the words correctly. I was really happy she said, “Ms. Dubose today is the first day I actually understood this book, because I looked at the pictures!” And I said that’s so good, I’m glad you took what we did and applied it during your reading. She said I’ve read it a few times but I never understood it until I looked at the pictures. So with her I left her with OK, make sure you’re looking at pictures and make sure you’re working on that fluency.

Independent Reading: Conference 4 and Transition to Sharing

I: Were there some kids who you had to get on track today as you were conferring with them?

T: Well really the ones I conferred with, they all seemed to be doing a nice job. But while I’m conferring when I’m at the table, I noticed that some of them were having more of a hard time staying on track.

I take notes on who I saw not engaged while I was conferring. I don’t really want to stop my conference to say, you need to sit down and read. I want to make sure my conference is good and solid. But I make notes of who I noticed isn’t really engaged, and we’ll work on it the next day. I was really proud of the ones I conference with. They all seemed to be doing what they know to do, like using strategies and staying engaged, and I was really pleased with them.

T: I really thought this group is doing a really good job of taking our mini-lessons and applying them. I think that’s a struggle. Sometimes I do the same mini-lesson over and over and over and it doesn’t seem to be sticking. But this year they seem to be doing a good job of taking and using what we’re doing.

I: Will you note down things like, they’re making a 1-1 match, or they know certain sight words, or things like that?

T: Like for him I wrote that he was tracking print. So I know that means he had the 1-1. if she would have read, “We have an alligator and” then I would have written the word alligator on top of crocodile so I would know that she – like what you would do for a running record.

If they weren’t having any kind of 1-1, I would note that, and find some different books where they can experience that 1-1.

I: So that might be another thing that you’re doing as you confer is thinking about if the book is appropriate or if they need another book.

T: Right. But I was really pleased today. When I got to them, the books they were reading seemed to be really appropriate, so I didn’t get to do any of that today.

T: At the end, the clean up song, I think that’s a good structure we’ve put in place to maximize their reading time and minimize – we just don’t want to waste time. We have such little time with these precious children, we try to make sure that every part of their day has some sort of reading. So the song I think is a good structure to incorporate some more reading while the table leaders clean up.

I: And the other kids then are reading the chart, reading the shared song. And then you have one child pointing at it, so you’re getting that 1-1 going.

T: That’s something that we’re really working on pointing to the song while we’re singing. That’s a hard thing, because they have so many – I don’t know what the word is – but they’ll hold words for a really long time, so it’s like – I’m still at this word? It’s really interesting watching them try to track print to a song, but it’s a good skill to have I think. We love using the song too because a lot of times if, like during writing workshop, if they want to write a word and they know it’s in the song, they’ll go and look at the song and use it to write. So we love using those songs for clean-up cues.

Sharing 1

I: Talk about the sharing.

T: I love the sharing at the end. Something about them verbalizing what they did as readers, and then the children hearing it, and then the children sharing what they think the reader did well. It's a really good way to have the strategies stick. They understand them better. They're more inclined to do them themselves when they see their friends doing them. So during the share time, I like to choose the people I conference with, because I know they have something meaningful. Not that they don't all have something meaningful to share, but I know they have something that the group can benefit from.

I: And you generally choose 3 children, 3 or 4?

T: Yes, it just depends. Sometimes it might be everybody I conference with. Today I conferenced with 5 people and I chose 3. So it kind of just depends on what they do for me and what I think the group can benefit from. Sometimes it's just if a child finally read a certain text, letting them share so they can have their confidence build. It's not always about them demonstrating strategies. It's about building their confidence and I want it to feel like a community of readers, and I think that share time is when they really do that. They didn't really do it today, but sometimes they'll be so complimentary of one another. They'll say, that was so great how you – good job, or there will be thumbs up. So I feel it's a really good way for them all to feel that they're all in it together, just a community.

I: And partly by having them share, but also when they get to choose the other kids to comment. So then that's another procedure you've worked on, how we say positive things, or ask good questions.

T: At the beginning it was, well, he didn't do this. No, let's not talk about what we didn't do, let's talk about what we did well. So now they default to positivity, which I think is great.

I: Wonderful