

A beginning of the year in second grade.....

We began our year by spending quite a bit of time working with "just right" book selection. (When I say we, I mean my partner, Carly, and myself -- planning together has been a wonderful thing!) While both of us have always spent time on that in the past, this year we are trying really hard to work through the gradual release model. In the past we would do some modeling and then look to the kids to take it on by themselves. This year we are trying to very slowly release the responsibility of whatever strategy we are teaching. Because being able to select a "just right" book is an important piece of our local assessment, we had extra incentive to do a good job. We started by anchoring their thinking by modeling our own book selection. (I used an appliance operating manual as my "challenging!") The kids have taken this so seriously. Many children seem relieved to have the responsibility to identify and let go a book that is "too challenging."

From there we moved on to about 2 weeks of tricky word strategies. Once again, we tried to really be aware of how we were moving through the gradual release model. We ended up developing a pretty amazing collection of "tricky word codes" for our post-its. They seemed to delight in showing how many ways they could work on a word. For many of the students, this seemed to be a pretty new concept, and, as usual, the least proficient readers were stuck in the "sound it out" mode. It is still a focus point for guided reading for that small group of students, even though the whole group has moved on to a new focus strategy.

Our first real work with MOT was a 2 - 2 1/2 week focus on Metacognition. As Ginger has pointed out in her past posts, taking the time to talk about "thinking about our thinking" has been well worth the time. For our introductory anchor lesson, we used an old bridal shower-type game. One of the students went out of the room while I explained to the students what would be happening. The student, Natalie, was going to come around and show them a tray of things. Their job was to "think and notice." That's all I said. Naturally, they were all very focused on the 10 - 15 school supply type objects on the tray. Natalie went around the circle twice and then left the room with the tray. Naturally, because they were thinking mainly about the tray, they could name almost all of the objects. However, they could not answer some basic questions about Natalie -- what she had on, what she said when she came in, eye color, etc. We talked about how they were so busy thinking about the tray, that Natalie slipped right by them. The link . . . readers are so often thinking about the words (tray), that the story (Natalie) slips right by them. In order to really be reading, you can't be so focused on the words that you miss the story. They really seemed to get that. We came back to that experience again and again throughout the study.

One of my favorite quotes was when one of the kids said, "you know -- I don't think I was really reading this summer because I wasn't doing a lot of thinking!" Yes! :) After lots of modeling and eye-to-eye, knee/to/knee sharing, we moved into coding with post-its and then a "thinking tracks" response sheet.

Our biggest frustration was, and still remains, finding a text that is "meaty" enough for some good thinking, but that the entire class can still read for partner work. We're still working that out. The kids want to be "fair" and share the reading, but sometimes the text is too challenging for

some of the kids, even though it was a text they had hear during read aloud, etc. I think that is probably less of a problem in the upper grades. Kristin and I were talking about the possiblity of pairing up the kids with a low and high reader for that portion and designating one person as the reader and one person as the recorder in order to allieviate that problem. Even with that problem, the pairs work was very rewarding. I think having someone to think with was a huge plus for most.

After we worked through the modeled and shared pieces of the gradual release, we stopped and created our anchor charts. Using quotes that the kids had made along the way, samples of their work, and the book jackets from our anchor books has made them a meaningful part of our classroom, rather than just a part of the landscape.

We have now just begun our focus on schema -- it has been an informal part of many of our past discussions -- they are already very comfortable with the word. We started our study today with an anchor lesson which we took and modified from Strategies that Work. We displayed an odd assortment of kitchen tools for the kids to see. They immediately knew they were from the kitchen -- and that began our discussion of schema. The aha moment was when I held up a melon baller -- everyone, with the exception of Nicholas, was mystified. He knew immediately what it was and explained it very clearly. A great example of how he had connected his background experience to make sense of what he was seeing. I know we will come back to that moment in future days. Tomorrow I will begin modeling my thinking and text to self connections with "The Patchwork Quilt" by Flourney. I'm also taking in one of the quilts my mother made me to help demonstrate my connections. It seems painfully slow on some days, but we know it will pay off in the long run.

Would love to hear how some of you are working through the gradual release model -- how much pair work are you doing? How do you fit guided reading groups in throughout the study? How do you determine your focus for small groups? All questions we are still thinking through . . .

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2nd grade