

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Helping Students Connect to Text

Graham Road Elementary School, Virginia • October 2010

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension
Practice: Teach Comprehension Strategies

Highlights

- Marie Parker, instructional coach at Graham Road Elementary School, discusses how she works with teams of teachers, especially in kindergarten and first grade, to develop comprehension strategies.
- Coaching at Graham Road includes modeling instructional strategies, videotaping classroom lessons, and helping teachers reflect on instruction and student learning.
- Parker addresses the specific challenge of helping students from diverse cultural backgrounds make text connections.
- Teachers carefully select topics or themes that build on students' experiences and help them develop background knowledge.
- Instruction begins with teacher modeling and guidance to help students make text-to-self connections.
- The school has created a book resource room that offers teachers a wide variety of published texts and teacher-made books to support instruction.

About the Site

Graham Road Elementary School

Falls Church, VA

Demographics

69% Hispanic

13% Asian or Pacific Islander

10% Black

3% White

4% Other

85% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

58% English Language Learners

12% Special Education

Through extensive school turnaround efforts, Graham Road Elementary has become a high-performing school with an enriched academic program that is tailored to the needs of its diverse student body.

- The school has developed a standards-based reading curriculum to serve as its core reading program.
- Teachers begin with a single-strategy approach and help students learn and use multiple comprehension strategies over time.
- Text discussion begins in kindergarten through establishing partner sharing routines and providing practice with the teacher and peers.
- A balanced literacy approach guides reading and comprehension instruction.
- Language development is incorporated into instruction as a way of increasing comprehension.
- Teachers attend weekly, grade-level professional learning community meetings to plan cohesive standards-driven lessons.
- Quarterly data meetings are held to discuss student achievement and to see how specific classes are performing.

Full Transcript

My name is Marie Parker. I'm the instructional coach here at Graham Road Elementary School in Fairfax County, Virginia.

My role as an instructional coach is to work with teams of teachers, especially in kindergarten and first grade this year. I do this in different ways. One way I do it is in professional learning community meetings that we have weekly, in which we unpack a standard, we look at some research, we look at videos, and we come up with specific reading strategies that our students need to acquire so they can become lifelong readers.

One thing that our kindergarteners struggle with throughout the year is making a connection with the book. We actually start here at Graham Road in kindergarten, at the beginning of the year, where the teacher's constantly modeling that connection, constantly getting that vocabulary in, and getting the students to realize that connections have to be made when they're reading for them to enjoy the book, number one, but also for them to understand the meaning of the story and to comprehend it.

Then, after the first quarter, then we will move in to doing more of "Oh, I *wonder* what you're thinking?" and just giving them the responsibility to realize, "It's my job now to be thinking, 'How is this book that my teacher is reading right now connected to another book?'" We actually start having the children express themselves orally and talking with partners and whole group on "What is the connection for you?" because everybody has a different connection.

During our instruction at the beginning of the year, a lot of our first-grade teachers and our kindergarten teachers are being very explicit in picking a topic or a theme in which they are focusing on understanding the words and the vocabulary of that. If the students in our population don't have these experiences when we try to teach the comprehension strategy of understanding, there is nothing for them to hook it upon; we have to provide these hooks, these experiences.

We have so many students at Graham Road with different languages and different cultures. When a student doesn't have the background knowledge for a particular book, we then reflect on what experiences the child has had. We go to the book room; we have an extensive book room at our school, in which there are different books from different publishers, so they have different background experiences. We've also had a wonderful opportunity in Fairfax County to actually create some books, where our teachers in our own schools have created books with pictures of our students in environments around Falls Church, Virginia. Having those books, the teacher can then choose those books instead of a book that the child has no experiences with.

When a teacher is struggling with getting students to learn, that's where my job steps up a little level. My first approach is through our professional learning communities, in which we talk, and we discuss, and we talk about strategies to develop their toolkit.

So, one thing that I do first is actually model it for the teacher. But when I model I have a pre-conference before, and I am specific about what I want the teacher to look for: I want her to look, what did I say and how did two or three students react to it (not the whole class). I want this opportunity for her or him to look at how the student is reacting to my prompts or to my directions. Then the teacher can try again the next day, after we have a post-conference about what did she reflect and what are her next steps going to be when it's her turn to be teaching.

Another thing that I do with the teachers is I use a Flip camera, in which they actually videotape themselves. And then, before we have our conference of the video of it—we both look at it—but I ask her to reflect: What do you think went well? What do you think you need to work on? And, most importantly, what

did the student learn? What did the students learn? Because if we just focus on what our prompts are and not if it's supporting the students' learning, then it's for naught.

When we have our post-conference of the video, we actually look at it together, and we analyze it together, and then we have an action plan: What are our next steps going to be? And—important for me—how am I going to support you in these next steps. Is it coming in to watch you again? Is it another video camera? Or do you think, based upon the learning of the students, that we need to work on something else at this time?