

# DOINGWHATWORKS



Slideshow

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Creating an Engaging and Motivating Classroom

Kim Callison • November 2010

Topic: Improving K-3 Reading Comprehension  
Practice: Engage Students With Text

### Highlights

- Kim Callison, who served on the IES panel that developed the *Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade Practice Guide*, illustrates key points in setting up a motivating and engaging context for teaching reading comprehension.
- Callison, Coordinator of Elementary Reading/Language Arts in Anne Arundel County Public Schools, covers aspects of the physical classroom environment, such as setup of materials.
- She focuses on effective characteristics of classrooms, including personalizing to student interests and abilities.
- She describes instructional strategies, like student collaboration, that keep students engaged and motivated.

### About the Interviewee

Kim Callison is coordinator of elementary reading/language arts for Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Public Schools. Her responsibilities include implementing and monitoring a comprehensive reading curriculum and providing professional

development for teachers, including reading teachers, and administrators. An educator for 32 years and a National Board Certified Teacher in Literacy, Ms. Callison has focused her career on reading instruction, curriculum development, and school improvement leadership. Her rich variety of teaching experience includes teaching special education students in prekindergarten through 6th grade, serving as an instructor for graduate-level reading courses, presenting at local and state reading conferences, and promoting literacy as a regional reading teacher specialist.

## Full Transcript

Title Slide: Creating an Engaging and Motivating Classroom

Anne Arundel County Public Schools  
Annapolis, MD

Teachers play a key role in setting up classroom reading environments. In this slideshow, Elementary Reading Coordinator Kim Callison from Anne Arundel County, Maryland, describes some key elements of motivating and engaging classroom environments.

Slide 1: Readily available reading materials

**Text:** A motivating and engaging classroom is organized to support reading instructional goals—this means that teachers have thought through what is needed, and books and reading instructional materials are readily available for both teachers and students.

**Audio:** A motivating and engaging classroom is organized. It's organized with books of various levels, various genres, in either book baskets or shelves or boxes or different kinds of tubs on the floor or around. All the materials that the kids need are at hand. All the materials that the teacher needs are at hand. I have seen beautiful, beautiful classrooms, but the teacher didn't plan to let the kids get to that. I have seen classrooms that are messy, messy, messy, but the kids are engaged in working with the books. And I've seen many classrooms in between where the kids know how to get the books from the classroom library and know how to put them back.

Slide 2: Reading throughout the classroom

**Text:** Teachers give reading a prominent role in the classroom by using all available space to facilitate a variety of types of reading instructional activities and to display key points related to past, current, or future reading instruction. The right use of classroom space makes a big difference in engaging students in reading. Listen as Kim overviews key aspects.

Audio: There are supports in the classroom around the room that will support the child's literacy development. For instance, key words, there might be a word wall, there might be a writing center. There will be literacy stations. There might be a computer kids can get to and work on with either games or writing. There will be a vocabulary center where students can enrich their vocabulary. There will be places where students can work together and there'll be places where students can work independently.

### Slide 3: Student ownership of the environment

Text: Teachers should involve students in setting up the classroom. There are a number of ways in which students can be given choices in organizing the classroom. This increases their ownership of the reading environment and increases their understanding of reading instructional purposes.

Audio: Developing ownership in the classroom is critical. For instance, if the teacher sets up a beautiful classroom library and "I like my books this way and I like my books that way," that's one way. However, if I take all the books and I say, "Kids, I want you to help me organize the books. Let's take a look at what we have. What would be a good way for us to organize the books?" And might want to say, "We might want to put them in piles by authors? Or could we put them in maybe books by fiction, books by nonfiction? We might want to organize them in baskets or little boxes?" And the kids could decorate the boxes. So they have an ownership to that classroom library.

### Slide 4: Texts at different reading levels

Text: Teachers have students at a range of reading levels. This means they need texts at a range of difficulty levels and they need to differentiate instruction. Whatever the student's reading level, reading comprehension activities should be challenging, but attainable with effort. Here's one idea from Kim that is simple to carry out.

Audio: So I might have books that are hard, harder, hardest. And that's a nice way of saying, because young readers want to be able to read. I mean, instead of saying easy, harder, hardest. Because who wants to always be reading the easy books? So if they think, they can read a harder book, that's great. That's another way of motivating.

### Slide 5: Frequent and effective feedback

Text: Teachers should provide frequent feedback for students when they have attempted a reading task or acquired a new skill. Feedback should be specific, not general, and it must be genuine. Good feedback increases students' intrinsic motivation to read. As Kim explains, even a good try is worthy of recognition.

Audio: Congratulating them on real learning and real attempt to learn. “We know things are difficult. We know things are hard, and you did not give up.” So praising students for their perseverance and for their energy of trying. Not just saying, “Oh, you’re so smart, you’re so smart.” But to say, “You really tried that. That was not an easy job to do, and you stuck with it, and I like that.”

#### Slide 6: Student collaboration

Text: Teachers should provide students with many opportunities to collaborate with each other. Student opportunities for active engagement with reading skills and content are increased when students work together. Motivation and engagement increase when they have the opportunity to take a role in supporting or guiding their peers.

Audio: Some strategies might include pairing up to work together. Students work together. Some may be working at close desks. Four kids could be together, discussing things. There will be opportunities for students to move about the classroom. We know that our brain needs to be moving to have engaged learning. We know that students need to be talking through things, and so turning and talking is critical.

#### Slide 7: Personalize to student interests

Text: Teachers can personalize text selection to pick up on topics students are interested in; they can expand student interests or help students develop new interests. Ongoing connections with student interest create a climate where students feel they are supported and valued. Strategies such as the use of response journals that Kim describes can help keep a personalized approach alive.

Audio: Sometimes teachers will have, like, response journals in their classrooms where kids will write what they are reading. You know, just kind of a reading log. Well, that’s one level, to write, “I read *The Cat in the Hat* on November 13th,” but the other thing is to write something about that book that we liked, and then the teacher can use a response journal. And then each day the teacher would respond, and when the child gets his or her journal back or reading log back, they’re going to see, “Wow, my teacher thinks I’m a good reader. My teacher cares about me. I want to read more.”

#### Slide 8: Know your students

Text: Teachers should know their students, know their families, and know their backgrounds. When teachers know their students, students know their teachers care. This is the foundation for instruction that will create motivated and engaged readers.

Audio: Our students come from so many different places and environments and backgrounds. Especially now,

we have students from many, many countries at this school, for instance. And it's important for the teacher to know a little bit about those countries, so that the students understand that their teacher cares about them. That they have a connection to them. Well, she may look different than they do, she can maybe speak a little of their language from time to time. That she knows about their mom, and she knows about their family, or their cousins. So it's important to make those connections.