

questions and sometimes ask students to back up their comments by reading information from the newspaper. Students spend about 15 minutes sharing and discussing what they read, so the entire lesson takes about 30 minutes at the start of each school day.

Q: How do your daily lessons foster inquiry and/or require research?

A: I assign curriculum topics in science or social studies for students to look for and/or choose important, recurring topics in the news for students to follow. Students choose parts of the newspaper that relate to the assigned topics. They become experienced at finding the assigned and “important” topics, and that allows me to begin discussions with general headings, such as “Durham” or “News” and know they’ll choose news related to curriculum topics, as well as high-interest stories about familiar people and places. *Learn more from the SAMPLES posted with this story (Durham—1)*. On some days, I ask students to find “great words” in the news and those words become the focus for instruction. *Learn more from the SAMPLES posted with this story (Great Words—2)*.

Students recommend stories to each other and often bring up questions that require research. One story in the local paper sparked the question, “Where is Nigeria?” and led students to a world map. Students love to work with maps, so news often leads students to local, state, national and world maps and discussions about what other cultures teach them and how they fit into the world.

Q: What did you learn from your daily lessons focused on current news and information? About the students? About teaching and learning?

A: ABOUT students:

Daily reading and discussion benefits all students; they learn from each other. Everyone applies his or her reading comprehension skills every day; differences in skills and interests do not stand in their way. I keep notes on each child’s reading, writing and speaking and choose writing samples for students’ portfolios, which parents receive. Parents also receive weekly reports that inform them on current work with newspapers. Feedback from parents let me know that students recall what they learn about current events. Children impress their parents by discussing current events at home. *Learn more from SAMPLES posted with this story (Weekly Progress Report—3)*.

I call on as many students as possible during class discussions. To encourage those who are reluctant to share what they learn from reading, I may write their names on the notes projected for all the class to see, beside something they share.

Even though I call the 30-minute daily literacy lesson “word study,” instruction involves word structure, handwriting, spelling, summarizing, note-taking,

interpretation of headlines and cutlines (titles and captions), opinion writing vs. argumentation or interpretation vs. reporting, charts, graphs and many other skills for reading informational text. *Learn more from SAMPLES posted with this story about a local public official and reasons he gives for setting a goal (Bill Bell—4) and about two local college teams and supporting details taken from news stories for predicting which will win when they play a basketball game (UNC vs. Duke—5).*

ABOUT teaching and learning:

By noticing what students choose to read, write and share, I assess students' skills and interests and learn about their preferences. I find that individualized literacy instruction can be assured by dedicating time each day to reading authentic relevant, informational texts and leading/structuring discussions that follow open-ended assignments.

Proficient readers tend to read entire stories and follow topics over many days. Less proficient readers read smaller chunks of stories. Emerging readers gain knowledge from what they read and view and what others share and make progress by choosing words that follow particular patterns, for example.

“Using the local newspaper provides many connections between students' lives outside of school and our classroom's academic goals. I have learned more about my students' interests and their community activities by having papers available every day. Often our news activities provide “the hook” for regular social studies and science lessons.” *Learn more from SAMPLES posted with this story (Mandela—6).*

A specific hook. Fifth graders at Club Boulevard visit Washington D.C. and, while in D.C., they meet with David Price. Ahead of their trip and before the meeting, students write and send letters about topics in the news to Representative Price. During the meeting, while holding their letters in his hand, Price speaks to the issues the students raise. The topics range from environmental concerns to immigration policies.

Q: What do your strategies require of teachers? How can other teachers replicate your lessons?

A: The steps are simple. Contact local and area newspapers to find out how to obtain print newspapers (or use digital editions if technology tools are available). Give students time to read. Help them identify curriculum topics in the newspaper to read about and allow them to read and discuss people, places and events that interest them and have immediate impact on their lives.

The possibility of helping individual students make progress with reading informational texts depends on committing time for reading, writing and discussing the news. Allowing students to choose parts of the paper that

interest them most increases their motivation as well as providing opportunities for teachers to individualize literacy instruction.

Q: What have you done and/or are you doing to advance teaching and learning?

A: I co-authored a book titled Literacy & Justice Through Photography with Wendy Ewald and Katherine Hyde and have applied the strategies explained in the book in my classroom and in professional development that I've conducted. *(Learn more from SAMPLES posted with this story, cover—7.)*

At a recent social student conference, my colleagues and I described how photographs and other art/illustrations in posters produced by teachers and students in Tanzania were used to explore topics in the curriculum.

I spend each spring break in Haiti, working with teachers as part of a team. Because Haitians speak both Creole and French, members of the team have been involved in publishing student-written books, such as an alphabet book written in Creole, to support emerging readers. *(Learn more from SAMPLES posted with this story, page on Bb—8.)*

Because I've taught in Charleston and Washington, D.C. as well as Durham, I've had opportunities to study with notable educators, which include Anne Adams and Nancie Atwell.

In my work as an education professional, I have learned that I, like all teachers, must continue to learn and challenge myself to implement best practices wherever I teach and support other teachers in their endeavors to address students' needs and interests and set high standards for teaching and learning.

Written by Sandra Cook, July 22, 2014. Questions or concerns?
nie@ncpress.com.