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#9 Webstorm – Lesson development

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For several years I taught reading to a group of advanced 1st grader readers in a “walk to read” model. This was a class in addition to the Core classroom reading time. We used the walk to read model as a way to separate students into skill groups to better meet their reading needs. We followed this model from Spring break until the end of the school year.

Students in my group were reading above grade level and capable of reading and comprehending 2nd grade material independently. I always did a research unit with this group of students as a way to allow them to read and work more independently on a larger scale project. It was important for students to be involved in the design of the research so a webstorm was the perfect way to begin the project.

I provided several non-fiction book sets on animals for students to use. They were to choose one animal they would like to research and report on and use at least 2 sources to gather facts. Before beginning the task, we would have to decide as a group what information would be important to include in our webs and why. The students and I brainstormed together the categories or nodes for the web. I started by creating a giant web on the classroom whiteboard and added categories as the students brainstormed them. This part of the lesson was done as a whole group with me as the scribe writing down categories students called out. After we had several different categories students thought were important to include we then organized our brainstorm. Some ideas were similar and we decided to combine them to make 1 category, other ideas were repetitive so we eliminated these, and some ideas seemed a little specific for everyone to use. We left these as their own categories, possible outliers that may or may not become part of the final product.

After the group brainstorm, organization and general discussion about what was and wasn’t as important students began their own web on a poster sized piece of paper. We decided that there were certain categories of information we would like to know about all the animals being researched. So as a class, we concluded everyone would include “food” on their web, what the animal eats and how they get their food. We also decided everyone would include “lives”, what habitat the animal lives in and perhaps specific places in the world the animal can be found. We also thought it important to describe the animal in a “looks like” category. Students had to describe why an animal has some of the physical features it does and how those features help them survive. Students were asked to include these 3 nodes on their webstorm. After that, the students could choose which other nodes they felt were important to include or which nodes they wanted to learn more about in relation to their animal. They were asked to include at least 2 other nodes. Many students chose “babies” as a node and described how many young their animal can have and how they care for them, others chose to do a subtopic under “food” and include information on hunting. Some students chose to add a “shelter” node, does the animal have a den, a nest, etc. How the animals “protect themselves” was another popular category.

The project carried on and eventually students took the research contained in their web and made a fact sheet for each different node. When completed they glued these fact sheets to a poster and drew their animal at the center. The final product resembled the web in structure, but now had complete sentences. Students shared these final products with someone researching the same animal. Then we had a “gallery walk” where I split the class in half. Half of the students would stand by their desk with their project while the other half went around viewing and asking questions, giving comments, then we switched.

If I had more time with this group I think it would be beneficial to have them research other topics where they create the web all by themselves after doing this initial research process. Because these students were 1st graders and this was their first time researching, it was pretty teacher directed with the webstorm, at least at the beginning. It would be fun to see the kids process this piece more individually. Another thing I struggled with is getting kids of this age to make notes! They needed more instruction from me about how to take a note from a sentence of information. They wanted to write whole sentences on their web.