

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Beth Grosso – Ladder of Inference: Application

STUDENT: We're doing Melanie's view on Chester, and we came up with a few fish facts that Melanie sees about Chester. And we could read them to you right now. So Chester is messing up the book with his red marker.

STUDENT: And he --

STUDENT: And he wants the book to be all about him.

STUDENT: And he wants to be king of the book.

STUDENT: And now we're thinking of another fish fact. And we're just discussing about the book, and we're looking around the classroom. Wall's over there with everybody's ideas to see if we get any ideas.

BETH: I don't know, it just came to me. The whole idea of the fish. I guess it was the idea of a data pool, you know? So I was just thinking data pool, fish swimming in a pond. And then I just sort of thought, wouldn't it be neat if... You know, and I did have -- that year I remember I had a real kinaesthetic sort of class. So they actually came up when they put the fish in the pond, and it just made the whole activity a lot more interactive. So I guess it was just the word "data pool" that made me think of fish in a pond.

And what about, "He is rude," is that fact or interpretation?

STUDENT: An interpretation.

BETH: Yeah, I would say those two are interpretations. Right? What is he doing that's making her come to that -- that's making -- it's it Melanie -- yes -- come to that conclusion? What's he doing that's acting spoiled, right? That's what you have to get at.

STUDENT: The fish behind the plant represents how this person, from the other perspective, doesn't know that this fish even exists in the data pool.

STUDENT: The biggest fish behind the plant, because Chester doesn't know that Melanie has to hand in her book at a deadline. So he's writing it in her book, but he doesn't know that she has a deadline to be met.

BETH: So how the kids talked about the fish hiding behind the plant. I think especially when they see that, they can understand how there's stuff maybe that's on my plate that no one even knows is there. So when they actually see a little fish hiding behind a plant, that makes them realize, it's just a visual reminder that that's the stuff that's on our plate that we don't see. These are the assumptions that we make of people sometimes, and we make them way too quickly. So that sort of visual helped.

I know even it helped one group when they were talking about the schema suitcase, because of course it was fish and water, so one person said, "Can I call it, instead of the "schema suitcase," the "opinion octopus?" And I kind of thought that was sort of sweet. They were making it real to them. But that was that visual that got them thinking, "opinion octopus," and then suddenly you have the whole difference between fact and opinion. So when they were confusing the two so much, suddenly this group, that was their big moment. It's, like, oh -- that's the opinion piece.

STUDENT: Because we use evidence from our schema suitcase, so --

STUDENT: To help us figure out that we're not going up too quickly. We were backing down to make sure that -- backing down our ladder to make sure that all of the fish were fish facts, not interpretations.

BETH: Once more voices are heard in the classroom, I think then more ears start to listen, you know? And that came out, I think, with the Ladder of Inference. A lot of the kids started to -- during a classroom meeting when they're telling what's happening in their lives, suddenly, you can hear a pin drop, you know? And everyone wants to learn, well, this is what this person is feeling. This is what this person is thinking. And I think that every student has to feel that they belong.

STUDENT: I like when people listen, because some people listen to your ideas and they can share.

STUDENT: It kind of shows you how sometimes you don't know what someone has. And you have to kind of think about what they have on their plate before you can just go ahead and judge them.

BETH: This classroom is a safe place for my students. And I think that the more they share, the more they understand that perspectives can be different. And the more they understand that perspectives can be different, the more willing they are to share their perspective. And I think that if that happens, then I feel that my kids feel safe, and then ready to take a risk, you know? For instance, if they're afraid to share -- at the

beginning, they work in a group, but then they all come knowing their entry point. And they're okay, they feel comfortable with their entry point. And then you have all the students who build each other up by saying, "Hey, your entry point grew." And then when we do a Reflect and Connect in Math, they'll say how this person's entry point grew. And so -- and the student's self-esteem grows. So I think that -- I'd like to think that this is a classroom where the kids feel safe.