

# DOINGWHATWORKS



**Audio**

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Helping Teachers Learn New Practice

Ready to Learn Providence, Rhode Island • June 2007

**Topic:** Preschool Language and Literacy

**Practice:** Use Interactive and Dialogic Reading

### Highlights

- Principles for relationship-based support of teachers
- Role of mentor in daily support for teachers
- Focusing professional development on student work/teacher observation/daily routine
- Setting mutual goals: teacher, mentor, coach
- Using video for reflection

### About the Site

Ready to Learn Providence

Providence, Rhode Island

### Demographics:

More than 90% qualify for free and reduced price lunch

Preschoolers who exhibit characteristics that put them most at-risk for early reading difficulty

**Site Highlights:**

- Daily use of Personal Literacy Plans by teachers, mentors, and coaches to collect data, track individual student’s literacy development, differentiate instruction, and guide self-reflection and professional development activities
- Extensive documentation of children’s learning including formal assessments, classroom observations, photographs and visual essays, audio recordings of children’s conversations, and student portfolios and work samples
- Systematic, explicit instruction focused on phonological awareness, letter-sound relationships, vocabulary, and comprehension
- Extensive, daily on-site mentoring including videotaping instruction
- Mentors form strong, reciprocal relationships with teachers and use observational and assessment data to set goals and engage teachers in developing action plans

**Full Transcript**

I am Christine Chiacu-Forsythe, and I am technically the Director of Early Reading First 2. We have two Early Reading First projects. I am employed by the Providence Plan with an initiative called Ready to Learn Providence.

Our overall approach to teacher support fundamentally is based on a real strong belief that we have, that creating a strong, effective relationship is fundamental to any work that we do with teachers. We even extend that to our work with children, to families, to other adults. Another thing we strongly believe in, in that our building and maintaining these positive relationships also are collegial and reciprocal. We’re in a learning process together, which guides our teaching and learning.

So one of the cornerstones of this relationship-based support has to do with honoring the past experiences and the previous knowledge base that teachers bring to the learning situation. We build upon the existing skills, behaviors, and attitudes of teachers as well as hopefully introduce them to new approaches. So our overall approach fosters problem solving and reflection.

Generally, the role of the mentor is to provide daily on-site support to the teaching staff at each of the four partner sites. So the wisdom of the partners when the grant was written was that each partnering site would hire the on-site mentor as an employee of that site to ensure that teachers had sufficient on-the-job training with the mentor, and who would also be viewed as a staff member—so

a colleague on site.

We focused much of our professional development upon the results that we get from either the child-level data or the classroom data. We always focus the pieces of professional development around those units of study and teachers sharing what they have done or questions they have about those particular units and, as well as our child-level data that is so wonderfully represented in—well, what I think, in the personal literacy plans that help teachers really focus on the individual needs of children.

We're always ending the sessions with teachers developing some action plans as to how they're going to use the information. And then there's always time for reflection. And again, we call that our own internal cycle of inquiry. We have to prove to teachers that any new practice that has—that we perceive has benefits must improve children's learning, especially accomplished within the daily routine, depending upon the teacher's learning style.

For example, there are teachers who are visual learners. So, coaches and/or mentors might demonstrate in the classroom so that teachers can watch and then follow it up with conversation about the outcome of the new practice.

We've moved to what we call focused observation and feedback. We know that in that realm of focused observation, that it is really important that we have mutually agreed-upon goals—teacher and mentor and/or coach. Again, it goes back to our approach to teacher support in that it's reciprocal. We have to honor that by engaging the teacher in what is it—or how is it that the teacher wants to achieve that goal.

One of the other lessons that we've learned is the power of the video camera. Now, that's a really interesting strategy. That doesn't only apply to struggling teachers; it's for all teachers. But being able to introduce that kind of documentation for the teacher can sometimes really help, because most of the time with struggling teachers, they really don't understand or realize what they're doing. So, and certainly another pair of eyes is helpful to that teacher, but when the teacher sees themselves—you'll see, with no editing. You know, there's no other lens besides the video camera lens. That's also a powerful tool to begin to address the issues and challenges of struggling teachers.

In our reflective phase of our work, we know that if we change our behavior—mentor, coach, director—that that usually elicits a behavior change from the teacher or the other adult. So it's really examining our own practice. And again, it goes back to fundamentally what we believe—this is reciprocal and we're also learners in this process.