



Constructivist Teaching by Heart

Newsletter, June/July, 2025

"Putting the child at the center of their learning."

School's Out: A Time for Reflection

It's Summer! Can you hear the collective exhale from teachers across the United States? Most schools in the U.S. still have an extended summer vacation. I (Krista) can't think of many other professions that completely close up shop in the spring and then reopen for business two months later, starting over in a sense, with new mandates, programs, students, staff, and curriculum.

I have often read that this is a counterproductive way to support children's learning and development - that the amount of time required for administrative tasks from the complete shutdown and reopening would be better spent on aspects of school that directly affect children. More worrisome, the time off creates an extended gap in learning, and often results in a slide backward in children's progress.



Yet, here we are in midsummer- not setting our alarms, seeing friends more than usual, or taking a little more time with our coffee in the morning. We may be cooking, walking, gardening, completing home projects, traveling, relaxing, reading for fun (yay), and spending more time with our families. Even if we transfer to another job for the summer months, it's different. I teach graduate courses in the summer, but I am still slowing down and doing many of the activities listed above.

Let's face it. Teaching is exhausting, even for those of us who love almost every aspect of teaching, like me. The end of the school year is even more exhausting. Students get spring fever and are ready to move to the next grade level, where they'll be even higher on the totem pole. We spend a lot of time wrapping up the school year. Could this be counterproductive? If there weren't an end, just a transition, maybe we wouldn't lose so much instructional time and energy celebrating (or tolerating) the "end of the year."

For me, "the end of the year" includes packing up my materials (as classrooms are often cleaned or updated over the summer) and preparing a report on the progress of each student I instructed in literacy intervention. I record three or more quarterly data points for each student, along with additional data on the amount of time spent in intervention, attendance, and anecdotal notes as necessary. This report always takes me longer to develop than I think it will because I stop and reflect a lot while working on it. I ask myself questions such as:

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- What went well? What didn't?
 - What do I want to replicate next year? What would I like to change?
 - Who benefited from the phonological awareness I incorporated into various interventions? Whose reading comprehension deepened? What about their writing development?
 - Who exited from the intervention because of the progress they made?
 - What is worthy of celebration? What still concerns me?

Writing this report prompts me to reflect on each child's progress and the effectiveness of my overall literacy intervention program.

I carry these reflections into my summer. Sometimes I think about the previous school year and the children I taught each day. I miss seeing them and checking in every day. I wonder how their summer is going. Summer does give me a chance to reflect on the previous year, rejuvenate, and gain some distance from the day-to-day demands of teaching.



But then it always happens. I start to anticipate next year. Long before summer is over, I start planning and thinking about what I want to accomplish in the following glorious year of school, when I finally get everything right (wink). It's thrilling to have the time and space to noodle on all of my options. Time to read professional books or articles and make notes about what I'd like to accomplish with my students. Incorporate more reader's theater into my lessons on Fridays? Start a vocabulary wall? Or ponder how I will get Antonio to stop reading as though he is a sports car driver and start to see the "stop" or "yield" signs (punctuation) for more fluent reading? I think about books for Jasmine, a reluctant reader who only leans into lessons if it's interesting for her. And so on.

One benefit of summer vacation for teachers is the opportunity to reflect on the last year and anticipate the coming school year. Our profession is challenging, and it's hard to be a constructivist teacher. The good kind of hard. The kind that is meaningful and worth doing. The kind that makes a difference in others' lives.

Why is it hard to be a constructivist teacher? Being a constructivist teacher involves knowing each child as a learner and designing open-ended lessons that enable them to build on their knowledge and reach the next step in their learning. It is teaching children "one at a time, all at once" as we write about in *Constructivist Teaching by Heart: A Child-Centered Approach for Educators, PreK-3*. It requires us to adapt materials to our students' needs and monitor the progress of each child, not just through electronic reports, but also through formative assessments and observations of our learners.



Constructivist teachers take an asset-based approach to planning for student learning. Learning what children *know* is more important to us than what they *don't know*. Now we have a place to start and build from there. Sometimes we have to help students untangle misconceptions so they can understand. We consider their dispositions for learning, language development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development. We plan for instructional units, themes, and projects with authentic learning and literature as the foundation.

Yes, this is a **challenge** – a fun, frustrating, collaborative, interesting, and, most of all, gratifying challenge. One that matters. It leaves an imprint on the lives of children. Isn't that why we became teachers in the first place? Let's ponder on that this summer, and celebrate the important work we do.

Summer Reflection Questions:



What went well last year? How will I bring this forward into my new school year?



What were 2 or 3 areas that I would like to build on or change from last year? How will I get started?

Q & A: Ask Krista & Dana...

Q: What do I do about my student's inevitable summer slide at the beginning of the year? Should I start new curriculum or review?



A: First of all, we don't know what students have held on to from the previous year and what they will be "rusty" at on the first day of school. So, we can jump in and give the students many experiences to read, write, sort, and spell words, problem solve, and have meaningful discussions right from day one. While we are teaching, we are also observing, coaching, and prompting when needed. We can tailor our small group instruction to the needs we have observed, helping students get up to speed. It is helpful to wait a few weeks to assess where students are until they have had some time to practice the skills we are assessing and are back in the swing of things at school. Some students may not have read or written much over the

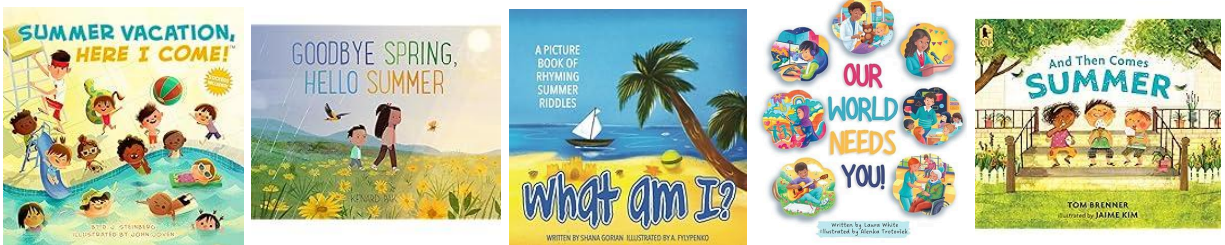


summer, but maybe they learned how to swim or built a fort, or spent days with a grandparent. Tap into these valuable experiences as you welcome them into their new classroom community.

Teaching with High-quality Children's Books

On the first days of school, we often ask students about their summer, sometimes even asking them to write about it. What if we read a loud a few children's books about summer as mentor texts that can broaden their thinking? Here are a few narrative, poetry, and information books that would be a nice place to start deepening our discussion about summer to support our many learning objectives, making the topic a little more fun, too!

SUMMER TEXT SET:



*Thanks for reading! Do you have comments, ideas, or questions
for the newsletter? Submit [here](#)!*

*We would love to hear from you and will be back
in August for our 2nd year of publication.*

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