

CURRICULAR INQUIRY

Becoming Meteorologists

—Chatsworth Avenue Faculty

When Chatsworth Avenue School second grade here in Mamaroneck began planning for a weather unit, the teachers wanted to provide the resources and opportunities for each student in the class to “become a specialist” in a particular kind of weather, such as clouds, hail, tornadoes, and hurricanes. Many of the teachers had taken district workshops on technology integration and so already had some ideas on how to bring online resources into the unit. Long before the unit was due to begin, the teachers started planning with the technology coach and the computer TA. Together, they collected a library of preselected websites, galleries of weather photos, and Unitedstreaming video clips. The coach set up a website with these resources and a simple how-to sheet so that students could access the site at school and at home.

Since the classrooms did not have equipment to share all these resources with the whole class, the teachers booked extra time in the computer lab and the library, which had projectors and large screens. The computer TA set up the computer lab with dual headphones, so that students could listen in pairs to the videos, a great way for them to debrief with each other as needed.

The websites, image galleries, and videos provided a rich library of information, which made it easy for kids to follow their curiosity and wonder. The vivid images provided by the photo and video galleries made the weather phenomena real for the kids in a way that would otherwise have been hard for them to experience.

Access to information was important, but the classes also needed to learn how to manage this information. To help kids navigate and read these sites, the coach taught minilessons: one on navigating websites, and another on using the students’ understanding of nonfiction text features to analyze the features of websites, discovering similarities as well as unique elements such as links, animated images, and banner ads. The students viewed the photo and video galleries, searched Web pages for answers to crosswords, took notes, and brainstormed questions. They kept track of questions they had answered, new questions that were raised, and questions that persisted. The coach contacted a local meteorologist, who agreed to email the classes and answer the questions that the students couldn’t find answers to (e.g., “Why don’t you ever get hurricanes and tornadoes at the same time?” Answer: “Often, hurricanes do spawn tornadoes”). It’s worth noting that, although

the whole grade was involved in the planning for the unit, teachers tailored the scope of the work to the needs of each class.

Finally, students selected compelling images, wrote about different aspects of their chosen weather element, and created a set of nonfiction picture books. Students then published their picture books; some classes published hard copies, while other classes also put them on the class website and encouraged families and other classes to email responses.