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Scientific approach

After teaching for 23 years, I've finally seen the light in science education thanks to the new Arkansas K-12 Science Standards. These new standards call for letting kids explore first and then read, research or listen next. This approach has led to a level of student engagement I've never seen before.

I'm currently a science specialist serving 16 school districts. I couldn't wait to share this type of teaching with other educators in my districts, including Shelly Hudspeth, a devoted seventh- and eighth-grade science teacher at Norfolk Elementary. After explaining the concept, she looked at me and said, "I'm going to try this, but I don't think it will work." A week later, I got an email from Shelly with the subject line, "I hate to write this note...Because I think you were right! :)"

Here's what she said:

"I began the unit with an investigation lab to focus on osmosis and diffusion. To be honest, I was expecting some bad behavior. But, you were right! Twenty fully engaged students were busy working because they didn't already know the answers.

"Today, we re-examined our work. Kids were so excited to see that their predictions were right. Some were excited even though they were wrong. Everything was a discovery! By doing "free investigations," they did some extraordinary trials.

"We ended with nonfiction text. I divided them up using three different articles geared towards different reading levels and regardless of their level, everyone had something to say. I almost cried! And while it may have taken me more time to prep for the lab, the actual learning process was so much easier!"

I'm very fortunate to work with amazing teachers like Shelly, who understand that great teaching sometimes happens by stepping outside the box. I am so proud of my colleagues across the state who are embracing the AR K-12 Science Standards because they greatly improve students' science education.

To sum it up, as another teacher told me, "I'll never teach science any other way."

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