

Classroom visit

Blair Middle School

Ms Serrano's 6th grade class, about 35 students

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Renata Cummins:

Here's my version of how the visit went. First we introduced ourselves, and explained a little about our research and how we got interested in science. Caj showed a stromatolite fossil, which was a big hit, especially since the students got to practice figuring out which layers were the youngest & oldest.

Then the students read aloud their topics for their science fair projects, and everyone went out to the grass, where we split into four groups, about 8 students per Caltech scientist. The groups were roughly divided by topic area: hard rocks or Earth surface processes/ biology. We spent the rest of the class (about 30 minutes) trying to help the students develop testable experiments relating to their topics, mostly talking with one student at a time while the rest of the group listened or chatted quietly.

I thought introducing ourselves was good, and having the show-and-tell stromatolite was great, but it was good that we didn't spend too much time talking about it. Having the students read aloud their project ideas was also helpful, to get an idea of what kinds of suggestions they would need, but it was good that we did this quickly too, because I think the time we spent in small groups was the most valuable. It was really helpful to have all four of us there to decrease the size of the groups.