

Capstone Reflection

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Literacy/Science infused lessons

Summary/Profile:

My first grade class consisted of 14 students total, 6 boys and 8 girls. There were no students with special needs, however there were two boys who have some minor behavior issues. I had no behavioral issues with them. When communicating with Mrs. Mathias beforehand she had told me that I would not be seeing a “normal” week or day, as the last two weeks of school lose any sense of a normal schedule due to special programs, assemblies, testing, etc. (I was with the class Monday through Thursday, and the next Thursday was the last half day of school). Even though she promised that she would have at least a certain amount of time each day to teach, there was no guarantee as to when during the day it would be, and every day it was different. I just had to be ready to go with the flow.

I was supposed to teach the five classes of vertebrate animals (mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fish) over my three day experience, because they would be going to the zoo with their pen pal class. They invited me to attend the zoo with them on the fourth day, where I was in charge of a group of students (my two students and each of their pen pals).

Day one of my lessons was direct instruction about the different types of animals. Day two was literacy learning centers based on the animal groups. Day three was creation of a new animal for our class zoo which fit one of the animal classes, and writing a short “zoo summary” of the animal.

Analytical Reflection:

Hook

I felt like I was very successful in my hooks. From day one I was able to grab and hold their attention. Mrs. Mathias also told me several time how she liked my hooks. She also told me (as a former 4-H'er herself) that she could tell I had been in 4-H and public speaking because of my comfort level and ability to grab and hold attention.

Tapping into Prior Knowledge

I felt like my picture sort on day one really was a way that I was able to informally assess where each student was at in their understanding of how animals are scientifically classified. The students also liked it. For the second day, I would have liked to done some more reviewing of day one before hoping into the center activities, but because of time pressures that day (it was the day when they put on a class play, in the morning and afternoon, for their 8th grade reading buddies and adult volunteers and for

their parents) we basically had to jump right into the centers. The third day I felt like we had a good review (where I made the students tell me what was specific to each class).

Setting a Purpose

I feel like my opening statement on day one of saying we were going to think like scientists set the purpose as well as them knowing that we were going to go to the zoo and see examples of these animal classes. Also, Mrs. Mathias and I told them that we would be attending a show at the zoo about different types of animals and they might ask questions about the different classes.

Vocabulary Strategy

In my Prezi presentation that I used for my direct instruction on day one, the main vocabulary word were in red, highlighting them. Also, they used it to fill in a worksheet with their picture sort (which we self-corrected as we went through each class) which then had pictures to help as a reference and mental picture.

Comprehension Strategy

The comprehension components came on day two and three (other than allowing questions and providing feedback as informal assessment during the initial presentation of information). I like the worksheet idea I used for trying to assess comprehension during the center activities, however, I would definitely re-format it for future use and do a better job of explaining it. I believe part of the problems some students had was it not being thoroughly explained (because of time crunch) and a lack of a previous experience with the same type of format. I felt really strongly about the creation of a new animal within an animal class as a good way to assess understanding, and I still believe it was. However, I had a few students who struggled with not crossing classes and breaking class lines. I believe this failure was largely my fault for not emphasizing and explaining that they had to stay within classes. I feel conflicted about what else I could have done. We reviewed before making them the characteristics of each class as far as what they have, but part of me wonders if we should have gone a step further and talked about what they do not have (fish have scales, they do not have hair, etc.). But, I also feel that this would have compromised my true understanding of each student's comprehension of what makes each class unique. I feel like directions and some students not paying full attention was the reason for some of the results.

Methodology

If I would teach this unit again I would teach it in a similar fashion. I believe some basic direct instruction is needed first because of the topics covered and the somewhat confusing information (such as warmblooded vs. coldblooded) which cannot be directly observed or understood in learning centers. However, the learning centers allowed students the chance to learn about some of the information in more depth and pick their areas of interest a little bit more. I am also an advocate of project based learning and assessment, which I believe the final project showcased.

Organization of Lesson Plans

I would not change the order of my lesson plans or even the order of items within them. I thought the sequencing worked very well.

Assessment

Assessment was really through the worksheets at the learning centers and the final project, combined with lots of informal assessment throughout. I would not change the assessment methods, the students loved it and did not realize that I was assessing their knowledge and we avoided a paper test which might not have told me as much information.

Class Management

I really did not feel like this was a major issue or something I struggled with. There were times when I had to get individual students back on task. The biggest issue I had was during the literacy centers because students did not fully understand what they were supposed to do on the worksheet. I was glad that I had Mrs. Mathias to help me get around to the different stations to answer questions.

Pacing

To infuse the science content with the literacy requirements for the capstone and to still create a fun and memorable experience (which were Mrs. Mathias' instructions to me from the beginning) this was the pacing that I really had to go to make it work. However, if I were to teach this same unit in my own classroom (which I would definitely infuse the literacy component with the science material in this manner, in fact I really would not change any of my content) I would really like to pace it out over at least a five day period (Day one: direct instruction, Day two-four: learning centers, part of Day four and five: project).

Holistic Reflection:

After this experience I feel much more confident and excited for student teaching! I cannot wait! I miss my time in the classroom and with the students, the experience reminded me why I want to teach and the passion that I have for teaching. Even though I did not see "normal" days, I think the experience was every bit as if not more educational about what a day in the life of a teacher is like. I was able to help them make ice cream with their 8th grade reading buddies, help them practice for their performances, be on recess duty with Mrs. Mathias, and lead a group at the zoo. Mrs. Mathias also needed to complete testing for district requirements and said to do so she normally has to spread it over a long period or get a sub. But since I was there and she was confident enough in my teaching abilities she asked me to teach a math lesson and lead other activities while she would pull students out for testing. This was an exciting and new experience for me to prepare for a couple of different activities to teach, in addition to my capstone, in one night. Teaching the math lesson was also a good experience for me because students were coming in and out, so I had to catch them up as they would come. When one student was not understanding the material I had to quickly think about how to visually demonstrate to him and the class so he and others would understand. I had to keep working with him some more in between the rest of the material for the class. Also, the first day of my capstone there was a student gone sick that I had to catch up the material on so that she would be able to be right on

pace with the rest of the class, and that was a good experience as well. Mrs. Mathias was constantly giving me tips and advice and being able to watch her teach was an amazing experience. She has been teaching 1st grade for 30 years and is well-known and respected as one of the best around. I am grateful for her willingness to work with me and for her honest feedback, I hope that I can student teach with a teacher as great as she is. She made it her mission that I would not just have a great capstone experience but a great teaching future and wanted to share any little “secret” she has, some of which she has only discovered in this last school year.