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Teaching Analysis Commentary:

Academic Language Lesson

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MGED 3015

TEACHING ANALYSIS COMMENTARY

This lesson was taught to Mrs. Ocie McMillan’s sixth grade Social Studies class at Gainesville Middle School. They were wrapping up a week of learning about the Age of Exploration, especially Prince Henry the Navigator and his School of Navigation. It seemed like an opportune moment to insert a lesson on academic language focusing on content vocabulary. Even though the class was in the history portion of their curriculum for the year, map skills are always important in social studies classes. It is vital that students not only understand the history that they are learning, but how the places that they are learning about are in relation to each other.

The Georgia Standards website shows that students are supposed to master latitude and longitude by the seventh grade, but any bit of practice with it will help them. Map skills are some of the skills learned in school that will stick with them forever. Knowing how to use a map can help them if they plan to travel in their futures or even to get somewhere across town from where they live. Map skills are global, literally and metaphorically. Knowledge of the map and the world at large allows students to see where things are in relation to where they are, and to see where they are in relation to everything else. Map skills help in other concepts by helping them to identify where ideas/beliefs/concepts are coming from. In a science classroom, map skills allow students to understand other environments and ecosystems. In language arts, it allows them to see where authors and their works come from and help them to gain perspective. In a math classroom, it can help them understand different kinds of mathematics and where we adopted different ideas and concepts from.

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This class is a gifted class. This is not to say that there were no challenges involved, but compared to the other classes at Gainesville Middle School, the needs were fewer. In most classes, there is a large percentage of English Language Learners, but that is not the case for this class. There are some students with Hispanic backgrounds, like a good portion of the school, but even those know the English language well enough to comprehend this lesson.

The pre-assessment for the lesson directly asked them to recall the answers, which were content vocabulary terms such as latitude, longitude, scale, etc. They were all familiar with the topics of the lesson, but it was clear that they needed more clarification of the topics. In order to learn the vocabulary, the students watched a BrainPop video, which gave them all the vocabulary terms needed for the lesson. Then, I did an activity with the whole class which explained the terms that they learned from the video. After looking over the students’ responses to the pre-assessments, it was clear that they had been introduced to the topics, but they were not confident in knowing the information. Some of the students mixed up latitude and longitude and the Equator and Prime Meridian, for example. For the questions that asked about the parts of the map, they knew some parts or where they were located, but not what they were called. It was clear that they needed some help to fully understand these topics. I gave them the type of pre-assessment (quiz) that I did so that I could get a gauge of what they knew and what I needed to spend more time on; it turned out that I needed to spend time on all of the information. In order to learn the vocabulary, I showed a BrainPop video and then worked through a class discussion to review the topics.

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After showing the video and working through the class discussion as a review. I pulled up a map on the projector. I asked, several different times and in different ways, questions that would prompt them to answer me with the vocabulary words I taught them. For example: “What kinds of lines run West to East on a map?” After giving the whole class time to think through the answer, I would choose a student to answer the question. Throughout the review discussion, I would go back to the earlier concepts and prompt the entire class to answer in unison, so that they were hearing the words over and over. Little did they know, they were being assessed. This formative assessment was used to “provide ongoing feedback both to the teacher to modify instruction and to the student to adjust learning behaviors, as described by Frey and Schmitt (2007). The BrainPop video introduced the vocabulary, the review class discussion allowed them to show me their understanding, and then they were able to apply it with the interactive class activity. I created a slideshow with maps of the world and on each slide; there were also latitude and longitude coordinates for the class to find. As suggested by Manning, I made this an experience that “allow[ed] active participation rather than long periods of passive sitting” (Manning, 2012, p.37). One by one, students would come up and find, with verbal help from their classmates, the correct point on the map. When they felt that they had the correct point, I revealed the correct point with animation on the slideshow. This displayed that while there were expectations involved, each student was given the opportunity to succeed, which is important for the fragile self-esteem that characterized young adolescence, as suggested by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (Manning, 2012, p.10). All the while, I kept asking which way latitude and longitude lines run, and which lines were the Equator and Prime Meridian.

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After the lesson, the class completed the post-assessment. It was comprised of the same questions that were on the pre-assessment so that I could see real improvement. From their answers, I saw that most of the students got all of the answers right. Their spelling was a little off, but the fault for that was mine. I did not even consider that the only time that they actually saw the content vocabulary words were in the video and briefly on my slideshow. I could have given them a spelling reference or word bank. Overall, they still did really well; most of the students answered all of the questions correctly. In the future, I will make sure that the students are exposed to these vocabulary words in both written and spoken forms.

References

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