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As the District Media Specialist, one of my fundamental priorities is to teach Information Literacy skills. The state of Oregon's standards of education dictate that performance and project based work should be pervasive in student curriculum. Work samples leading to the CIM and eventually the CAM focus on gathering information, evaluating and synthesizing that information, and integrating technology as a tool to achieve academic goals. In addition to being a Media Specialist, I also teach technology to middle school aged students. This position affords me a unique opportunity to provide a foundation of information literacy instruction combined with the use of technology. Thus, I chose this unit of instruction to introduce the research process to fifth grade students.

One goal I had for this unit was to make it as meaningful as possible, interesting and fun. I felt that some of the material that was to be presented to students had a tendency to be rather bland and dull. Discussing overall concepts of the research process and citing sources were abstract lessons and I felt I could lose a few students. To make the unit more meaningful, I coordinated with the fifth grade Social Studies teacher. Toward the end of the year, the class creates a PowerPoint presentation about a state they adopt from research they conduct. In the past, this project has been done without formal guidance in the research process. The students would get the job done but they would not learn the mechanics and techniques associated with the research. The Social Studies teacher and I discussed splitting up the project in order for me to teach the research skills and how to apply it to the Adopt a State assignment. The students would then take the research information and apply it to the presentation and speech component in the Social Studies class. Whenever possible, I made connections to the other class while I was teaching and in our class discussions. Hopefully, the students would understand the benefits associated with cross-curricular instruction.

Overall, I was pleased with the process and end product of the unit. Class discussions were an integral part of instruction and most students responded well and contributed to the learning process of the entire class. The Boolean game was a huge hit because it was something completely different than typical technology training. My goal is to incorporate more techniques like this to teach rather abstract topics in a fun and engaging manner. Some of the topics, however, were dull and tedious. Because my teaching style primarily employs visual demonstrations and hands on activities, abstract tasks like thinking, planning and citing sources were difficult to teach as a concept. It is easy for them to just dive into a project without putting thought and planning into it and hope for the best. I tried hard to instill the importance of these concepts as integral steps because while they could do the project without a formal process, the experience may not be long lasting and impressionable.

It was very informative as a beginning teacher to reflect on the students' interest level throughout this project. Most students were engaged and successful in completing the assignment. However, I was surprised that some did not complete their bibliography portion of the project. The bibliography is a more tedious component of the research process and did not seem to interest the students very much. It was difficult to convince them of the importance. Most students did complete this portion of the unit fine, but of all the deficiencies, performance on the bibliography section was the weakest for the class.

Lesson components I would change the next time I teach this unit:

1. Create more interactive and engaging activities. The success of the Boolean game really emphasized the notion that fun activities can bring home abstract concepts to a new level of understanding. If I had created some interactive activity for teaching bibliographic references, the students may have been more successful with their tasks.
2. On a similar note, create more practice for citing sources. Up until now, most students were not exposed to formal bibliographies and had no practice creating one. I would like to create an additional lesson focusing on citing sources and giving more practice to the students.

As a unit by itself, the instruction is not as constructivist as I would like it to be. I like looking at a culminating project as a capstone activity to a unit. It shows application of knowledge and how well the student learned the material. However, teaching formal steps in the research process involves learning the theory and practice as a foundation to application. Class discussions were necessary to explain the responsibility students have as researchers. Furthermore, this unit was part of a bigger unit which did include a culminating project, in this case a PowerPoint presentation.

After the research was done and the presentations were given, I discussed this unit with the Social Studies teacher. I was very pleased to know that he observed that the students seemed better prepared and comfortable coming into his unit after the completion of mine. The transition between the two classes was seamless and straightforward.

The concept of collaborative teaching is very appealing to me as an educator. I feel that I teach very basic skills to help students be better learners in other classes. Most if not all skills learned in my class can be applied to just about any other class. By working with other teachers, I can create units of instruction, like this one, to enhance the cross-curricular bridge and help make education a more real and applicable experience.