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Teaching Writing
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Project 4: Teaching Writing Lesson Plan Reflection

 Today I took part in my practice-teaching experience in front of the class, and overall found it to be a positive and educational experience. While I know that there was some definite room for improvement, I feel that my lesson on sentence combining was successful and effective, for the most part. First and most importantly, these opportunities to participate in practice teaching (both in my clinicals and classroom projects) reaffirm the reasons I want to be a teacher: because I love sharing knowledge with others, encouraging students, and spreading the power of reading, writing, and speaking with young minds. To begin, I tried to ensure the high quality of this 30-minute writing lesson by working hard to follow what I’ve learned about solid teaching writing strategies and integrate that into my actual lesson. For example, I allowed for student participation and involvement in the lesson, began with a writing prompt that brought students to the proper mindset of the lesson, and allowed students to work together to ultimately evaluate their peers’ work (sentences). In addition to following the basic lesson plan guidelines, I did my best to differentiate my lesson by appealing to a variety of learning styles (allowing students work alone, in groups, move out of the desk to the board) and following learning objectives in accordance with the Common Core standards. In this spirit, I believe that I promoted higher-level thinking during my lesson through the use of self-construction of sentences (by way of combining separate sentences), as well as offering challenging examples from which students were to apply the grammatical and stylistic concepts covered in class to their own writing.

 In terms of student interest, I believe that I was able to engage students throughout the lesson through my different activities and active involvement. Throughout my lesson, I did my best to check for comprehension, keep students on task through the process of going around asking for any questions, and having students respond to my own questions appropriately. My main evidence that my students achieved my learning objectives of defining the concept of sentence combining as well as being able to distinguish/craft their own variety of sentences was through their excellent responses on the board. After first having students practice using examples individually and then moving towards group work, I was able to see if students were interested by their volunteering to participate and respond to my questions, their overall attitude toward the lesson, and (eventually) any feedback from the homework. I enabled diverse students to achieve mastery of my learning objectives through several opportunities to practice sentence combining. After first going through the grammar/sentence combining handout together, I gave students the opportunity to practice individually combining their own sentences. Then (in terms of differentiation for students who work better in groups, for example), I afforded them the opportunity to work together to combine sentences in different ways with their partners before evaluating one another’s work. I also tried to provide some simple and some challenging sentences in my activities to accommodate for potential diversity in student learning levels.

 I again know that students achieved my target objectives through the use of informal assessments through the lesson. I began by having students write a prompt and then answering verbal questions relating to sentence combining before trying to work on their practice examples. Since almost all students were not only able to combine their sentences more cohesively and effectively but also explain how the sentence combining changed the style and flow of the work’s meaning, I know my main objectives were met. My second form of informal assessment — or evidence that could prove my students achieved those objectives of understanding sentence combining and then applying the strategy to their own writing — would be accomplished through my adapted homework assignment. This brief take-home task asks students to devise their own three sentences before combining them effectively (they were also then asked to write how their particular combining of those sentences changes the flow or craft of the work). Making sure that they follow this strategy during an upcoming paper or essay might be another way I can check for student understanding to fulfill my main goal of helping students see that there is a variety of ways in which sentences can be combined for different and useful effects.

 The main alternative strategies that I offered for diverse learners (including special needs students, gifted learners, and second language students) in this lesson was my variety of sentences and styles that I tried to incorporate throughout the thirty minutes. I tried to integrate both easier and more challenging sentences to help students of different levels understand the concept of sentence combining, as well as get students out of their seat and participating (to better hold attention for students who have a difficult time paying attention). Looking back in reflection, however, I now realize that I could have adapted my lesson more effectively to allow for special learners, including those with special needs, gifted academic ability, or second language learners. Firstly, I might have tried including sentences that offered some words in a students’ native language, as well as specifically giving students (again depending on ability level) a particular set of sentences instead of handing them out at random. Gifted students, for example, might receive more challenging sentences, while students who struggle would be offered more basic sentences to first help them grasp the concept. In addition, I could have intentionally split an actual classroom of students into hand-picked groups so that students of a variety of different ability levels could work together to come up with their own distinct set of combined sentences.

I think my main alternative strategy for teaching this lesson — after reading student comments and listening to peer feedback/Dr. Kennedy’s advice — would be to have found some point early on in the lesson to give students a paragraph or so of a personally written narrative or sample text that uses sentence combining. For example, the first paragraph could be one that does not use sentence combining well (incorrect grammar, much repetition, lack of focused style). Then, I could have students work together to combine those sentences in a real-life context to help them apply those strategies and have an example that we practice as a class first. I think that applying this activity in a 30-minute lesson wouldn’t be feasible, but I might certainly want to apply it in a real 45-minute lesson. With this sense in mind, I might always make a couple other minor changes to my lesson to increase student involvement and success. I believe allowing some more time for activities (rather than “rushing” through to get the lesson done) would have helped the sentence combining concepts I was trying to teach be better understood by the students. I might have also tried using the projector or computer to have students show one another their sentences for better background context, as well as offer printed copies of directions to make them clearer. I believe I could use this lesson to connect to tomorrow’s curriculum by first correcting the homework together (to see if students now have a better handle on sentence combining), as well as integrate this concept into the longtime curriculum by having sentence combining be a point of notice in their overall grade in an upcoming paper or essay.