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Observation-Reflection
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Observation and Reflection of a Social Studies Lesson

Introduction

My social studies observation was at Fay Elementary, a warm school nestled in the ethnically diverse neighborhood of City Heights a suburb of Southeast San Diego. A typical school with corridors and classrooms lined alongside, children mindful when running avoiding to bump into an adult with sneering eyes reminding them, “No running!”, and teachers scrambling to keep students on task. However, none of that is visible as we enter Mr. McEwen second grade classroom, which was neatly arranged with student work and posters covering the otherwise bare walls of the classroom. round desks arranged in half of the room and the other half of the room had the colorful squared rug for the students to sit on in front of the SmartBoard.

The students had returned from participating in a Water Assembly, making a smooth transition into social studies. The topic for today was - Natural Resources - well integrated curriculum. The lesson objective for today was -

1. Today we will discuss 3 vital natural resources we use. How we used in the past and how we use today in the present.

2. We will also explore and discuss how the products arrive to us, that is the cycle of food production. CHSS 2.4

Lesson Implementation

Mr. McEwen seamlessly connected what the students heard at the Water Assembly to the social studies lesson he was going to teach. He briefly asked them what they learned at the assembly and that water is one of the natural resources that we depend upon. He introduced the new terms - technology, natural resources, products, and raw materials - that they would be using in the lesson. He taught these new terms in two ways: first he had them repeat after him each word making sure to say it clearly, and then he used the SmartBoard (technology) to teach the definition of the word with a picture to aid the visual and English language learners. By doing so, he was able to reach out to a varied level of student understanding - the fluent reader -

sat back and processed; visual learner - made connection between words and picture; the doer (kinesthetic) - volunteered to come up to the board to drag the definition to the word; logical/ thinker - could sit back and absorb; one who needed some time to process - was able to soak the word which was repeated, and one who was still acquiring language - could hear multiple times what was being said.

Mr. McEwen, then showed them a short video (BrainPop Jr.) about natural resources, after which he asked them to turn to a partner and share one thing they learned from the video. The students shared what they learned, once again an opportunity for all students to hear what their friends are thinking, correct what they thought as well as give opportunity to ask questions - application of TCI approach: Cooperative Interaction. Next, building on students prior knowledge and the short video he turned their attention to three main natural resources and had them categorize photos on the SmartBoard into these categories - air, water and land. He had photos of a garden hose, pot of water, coal, furniture, orange tree, etc. As students volunteered to come up and place the photo under one category, Mr. McEwen created space for the students to discuss what the photo is of and in what category it would go - collaboration. He gave students the opportunity to discuss and talk through categorizing versus just telling them the right or wrong answer. As an example, the orange tree they realized could be categorized under all three (gives oxygen, needs water to grow and grows on land).

Next, slide on the SmartBoard was past and present technology. Students once again interacted with the SmartBoard to categorize photos of technology that was used long time ago and that is used today. Example, wagon, seeder, truck, toaster, etc. The lesson came to an end. He summarized by asking what they thought was the focus of the lesson today - natural resources, which are, air, water and land. Next, he said we will learn how these resources move.

Checking for Understanding

As I described above, Mr. McEwen repeatedly checked in for student understanding. He asked open ended questions like, “what do you think?”, he asked, “nod your head if you think that is right?”. Another powerful strategy he used to check for understanding was asking students to correct each other. He did this when a student would come up to the smartboard and drag the picture under the category, he would ask the students to agree or disagree. This allowed him to do formal assessment as well as check for understanding. Further, he reviewed the key words intermittently by asking them what that was. Example, he said, “natural resources are something that is already there”. Finally, he had student engage in partner talk and then share their idea.

Strengths, Areas of Improvement and/or Next Steps

I believe, a strength in Mr. McEwen's lesson was that it was comprehensive. That is he stated the purpose, he made connections, he allowed interaction, and had multiple entry points for varied learners. Other strength in the lesson was that Mr. McEwen did not pretend to know everything but he became a learner with the students. He demonstrated this by also, wondering, asking, and doubting when categorizing. This created a community of learners versus the teacher and the taught binary.

My suggestion for improvement would be more partner talk, less use of technology and slowing the pace down a little bit. I felt that there was too much information coming the students way and not enough time to absorb it all. I say more partner talk because there were a handful of students who did not participate and having partner talks gets their thoughts out. Interactive SmartBoard was useful but it also took away time from real discussion as students tried to navigate the 'SmartBoard3 and pen' which had its own mind. If this was the first time (which it seemed like) the students were introduced the topic of natural resources, then this was too much crammed in forty minutes.

Conclusion

In Mr. McEwen lesson I saw components of TCI approach. He made available to the students multiple entry points to access the content, he used collaboration to teach and learn and he led, "students through a step-by-step process of discovery" (TCI 2005, p. 18). I have a bias towards instruction that is scripted versus inquiry based learning because I have had the privilege to be in an inquiry based science classroom and have seen students struggle through the disequilibrium to arrive at their own understanding of the concept. Hence, in comparison, this lesson seemed to me a little too structured. Learning did happen because Mr. McEwen was actively engaged and aware of his students needs, keeping them engaged at all levels, accessing them and providing opportunities for collaboration and questions.

His classroom management was astounding. With few words he was able to give instructions and get a response. Glad to have had the opportunity to observe yet another inspiring teacher.