1. Context and Question

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TE 804

Inguiry Project

Due to the current trend of focusing on high stakes testing and data driven decision making in most school districts today, student success in school seems to be taking a back seat resulting in students becoming less motivated and more apathetic toward their school work. So, how can I as a teacher combat this trend and successfully engage kids in the learning process? Students are apathetic for a variety of reasons. Finding the root of that apathy is key for solving the problem. For my 7th graders, I find from experience that much of what the district asks of them , based on the pacing guide which involves Common Core Standards, is over their heads. A Close and Critical Reading (CCR) for example is intended to prepare the students to summarize, recognize author strategies, identify theme, and then apply that theme to the world. After doing a few CCRs in partners or groups, I thought my kids were ready to do individual work. However, I soon discovered that many students incorrectly answered the question or just skipped the last two questions altogether because they were too difficult or they forgot what a theme was. I thought to myself**: "How can I break down assignments like this and meet standards and objectives while boosting engagement and combating student apathy?”**

2. Strategies and Activities

A. Create a CCR game that involves group work and share time

I used a game that I learned during a professional development meeting this year. I had the students form groups of four after reading a text selection. Everyone in each group chose a different color poker chip. After they picked their colors, I revealed to them which of the four CCR questions matched their poker chip. They were responsible in their group to just answer that question. A randomizer chose who would share from each group.

B. Introduce an enjoyable way to learn about the 1960s before reading Glory Road

I created a webquest for the students in which they worked in partners to gain an understanding of life back in the 1960s. Marshall suggested breaking down assignments, so the webquest was broken down into six parts: discussing theme, making a wordle, answering historical questions, interpreting song lyrics, answering questions about basketball, and then researching the 1966 Texas Western Team. Since this story is a screenplay, I also had students read the character parts out loud.

C. Allow students to choose their biographical person for a report and turn it into a poster presentation

To intrinsically motivate students, I let them choose their own person when researching a biography report. In addition to their essay, I outlined a poster for each student/partnership to complete. The poster is visually stimulating and allows students to express their creativity.

3. Findings

A. Upon seeing “CCR Game” written on the board while walking into class, students were excited to spice up the dull pattern of CCRs. After reviewing the four CCR questions with them and reading out loud as a class, they were thrilled to be working in groups and splitting up the work. I told them their work needed to be complete enough and done well enough to share with the whole class. That created a slight panic, but stimulated more diligent work. I explained to the students that I would be using a randomizer App that would choose a random group number and person from that group. They got very excited and sat with anticipation. Their engagement levels were up and they still frequently ask me if we can use the randomizer in class. I used Marshall’s suggestion by paying close attention to the invisible kids. This game gets them involved too with random selection.

B. The webquest not only sparks interest by using technology in the classroom, but it also follows Marshall’s advice by breaking down assignments into manageable chunks for the overwhelmed students. My students loved learning the history by jumping from website to website. Each student broke up the work with a partner and successfully received background knowledge for the Glory Road screenplay and the 1960s.

C. Upon instructing my students to complete a biography report, I heard moans and groans. When I told them they could work as partners, they could choose their biographical person, and they would be doing a poster, I received positive feedback. With a tight schedule, my students are currently producing work that is more creative and kids are legitimately interested in the life of their person. They often approach me in class to tell me random facts, which indicates they care about their learning. In the future, I need to take Marshall’s advice to heart, keeping more of an eye out for the "invisible" kids in my class, as they may not work with partners because they lack friends.

Findings

Marshall, Jeff C. *Overcoming Student Apathy: Motivating Students for Academic Success*. Lanham, Maryland. The Rowman & Litttlefield Publishing Group, Inc. 2008.

Chapters:

"The Overwhelmed"

"The Invisible"