

Reflection Paper

Subject: English

Grade: 10

Module 3: Instruction for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: Using technological and digital resources strategically to support learning.

Goal:

I will research and implement strategies in my instruction that enable students to be critical consumers of information when they use various media resources. As a result, students will be able to evaluate bias in media resources and determine a source's credibility. (Indicator 3)

Initial Summary:

This school year, my school has implemented a policy granting all students access to Chrome Books for their academic studies. Students each receive a Chrome Book at the beginning of the year to use in and outside of class. This has created ample opportunities for students to become digital citizens and develop career and college readiness skills based on 21st Century Learning. When students enter 10th grade, the concepts of bias and author's purpose is still very complex and causes a great deal of confusion. These ideas can be approached in a multitude of ways, lending itself easily to the use of media sources. Based on data from Common Assessments from the previous year, I discovered that student knowledge of bias had improved from the beginning of the year to the end, but that they were still choosing unreliable sources for their papers and not taking into account the author's bias when analyzing and interpreting resources. This created a concern that students may not completely understand the concept of being a critical consumer information and that I was not teaching them these skills in a relevant and practical way. Since students now have ready access to technology, discussion on digital citizenship and critical literacy is much easier to incorporate to the classroom. This lends itself to greater discussions of author's purpose and bias, because they can look up additional resources right there in class instead of having to plan ahead to schedule time in the computer lab. I realized that we should be discussing how the instant availability of information has diminished the reliability of information, and also a person's ability to discern reliable information from fabricated information. However, I have up to this point been too teacher-directed in my approach to research with my students, which is probably why there is little to no autonomy with author's purpose and bias. Instead, I should structure ways for them to explore issues they are interested in and build those resources into student-led discussions about bias and credibility.

Reflection:

At the beginning of this school year, all students received Chrome Books as part of the district's initiative to develop critical digital citizens in our students. Having taught a research unit the previous year, the 10th grade teachers decided that we needed to spend more time instructing our students on becoming critical consumers of information and not only choosing reliable sources, but relevant ones as well. Last year, many students picked the first sources they came across on the subject, instead of taking the time to skim through multiple sources to find the "perfect" source, or at least one that would be easy to incorporate into their writing based on what they were trying to prove. Even having taught a research unit the previous year, I wasn't sure how to approach the two mini-lessons we decided to give in order to teach our students these skills. The previous year, I had glazed over the subjects very quickly with students and I wanted to make sure the lessons would be practical, engaging, and student-centered. We decided that we shouldn't be spending more than 15-20 minutes on each lesson, including a brainstorm activity at the beginning. For the first lesson, students brainstormed ideas on what makes a reliable source and how you know you can trust an author. Students came up with good answers, including but not limited to: the author having a degree in the subject, if the article was published in a well-known magazine or newspaper, and if there seemed to be other sources of information referenced. Everything seemed pretty good so far. I then went through my quick "checklist" of qualities of a reliable source and did a quick 5-question post-assessment questionnaire to make sure my students understood the objective of the lesson and would therefore be able to apply it to their own research. 85% of students scored higher than an 80 on the questionnaire, and the lowest score was a 60. Seeing these scores, I was confident my students would be able to find better sources than the previous year's students. However, when I collected research charts electronically from my students the following class, I was in for a serious disappointment. The links students included in their charts of the articles and sources they were planning on using for a debate often did not live up to the expectations of the checklist. When I did a follow-up survey, 75% of students admitted to going to the first four sources that came up in their google search and using them, instead of "shopping around" like we had discussed.

I went to my mentor and vented my frustration, wondering why, after they had done so well on the post-assessment during my lesson, they had gone and done the opposite of what we talked about. We decided to consult my trusty English Teacher's Companion to look for ideas in the chapter on digital citizenship. Jim Burke, the author, included an activity called "Learning to Learn, to Think, and to Talk" that offered a good basis and could be easily adapted for my purposes. Not only did this activity require students to weed through sources, but they also had to put into their own words what questions they were trying to answer by doing the activity. While the activity was initially meant for preparation for discussion, we decided to adapt it for research by re-wording questions for our purposes, but keeping the same basic structure. This new activity required students to go to a hub of resources, instead of simply googling a topic, already limiting the resources they had available to them. We created a page on my classroom website and put a variety of good and bad resources for students to choose from to answer their research question. Then, we set it up so that they had to evaluate three different resources using the new activity sheet, which asked them to set a purpose, preview each article for content, and finally evaluate the article using the checklist they learned about previously. The results of this activity were far more successful, possibly because students were able to apply their knowledge on a small scale before taking it to the vast scope of google. After this small recalculation, I knew I was not approaching these mini-lessons with enough scaffolding for students to be successful in the final assessment. My mentor and I decided to re-structure the second mini-lesson before giving it.

Prior to giving the second mini-lesson, we decided it would be a good idea to review some of the work her seniors were doing with critically reading sources based on a topic or question. We reviewed concept maps done by several of her classes based on different topics to see what information

students got out of the sources they were given. This led to the idea of using a similar concept map approach to finding relevant articles. We developed a lesson plan that modeled a concept map for finding specific, relevant articles that still fulfilled the requirements of a reliable source we had already discussed. We wanted students to be able to discuss their ideas with their peers for this lesson, since the last one was so individually-based. During this lesson, the brainstorming was a step-by-step process. We started with a "fake" research question on the board. The first time we branched out, we came up with our own answers to the research question and branched out based on that. Then, students worked in pairs to find reliable sources on the topic, skimming them for information related to the topic. We then reconvened and worked on the next step. Each pair reported on what they learned about the topic from the sources they found, creating a second tier of branches in the concept map off of their initial ideas, and some new ideas coming off the base, all in a different color. Then, we used a different color line to link ideas together that were relevant to a particular stance. The sources we "linked" became the relevant and reliable sources we circled for use in our "fake paper." Once they saw how to approach the concept map activity, they were then broken up into groups of four. Each group of four had a different topic to research, along with its research question. The lesson ended up taking longer, due to the real time research, so students spent the rest of class brainstorming their initial ideas for the concept map. The following day, after finding a few good resources for homework, they finished the process, coming up with a final list of three sources that they could use to prove the answer to their research question.

During this process, the scaffolding they received in the added lesson on reliability meant that students were able to find reliable sources relatively quickly. Students found organically that not all articles on the topic they were given were relevant to their viewpoint by the end of the concept activity. I learned that taking the extra time to use new skills on a smaller level before applying them to the big picture meant extra practice and the assurance that the concept would sink in and carry over to other lessons. I also learned that by providing students with the opportunity to discover things on their own about research (such as the fact that an article on women's suffrage wouldn't necessarily help them answer the research question, "What has the feminist perspective added to our perceptions of literary works?") was much more meaningful than standing up in the front of the room and describing the importance of relevancy in honing their research. I also learned how to incorporate concept maps more effectively into my instructional practice, finding that previous uses had been unsuccessful at times because of a lack of direction or focus in what students were supposed to brainstorm.

At first, students were understanding the mini-lessons in the conceptual plain, but were having difficulty putting those concepts into practice because of the vast scope of the internet. By streamlining my lessons and making the process more clear through scaffolding and modeling, I was able to dispell some of the mystery between the conceptual and practical applications of the concepts. Now, students need only return to the checklist I gave them to do a quick check for reliability for any source they bring to the classroom, and they have a clear process for eliminating irrelevant research on a topic, which has really served to focus their research. After two weeks of practicing these strategies, the impact showed that they helped focus student writing in general. It increased student confidence in their ability to do research and while they still complained about it being a time-consuming process, they saw the value in it after seeing increased scores on their research papers.

To continue to grow and improve my instructional strategies surrounding digital citizenship and critical consumerism, I intend to utilize similar approaches when I teach students about bias. Since I had to re-teach these concepts, the focus on bias got put on the backburner for this particular set of lessons. However, given the success of this approach, I am confident I may use a similar approach to get students to understand and apply

their learning of bias, especially now that they have had some practice with this approach. Bias will be another way to look at an author's credibility, taking their evaluation skills to the next level, even though it is difficult for them to keep their own bias out of their writing. I also plan to utilize similar approaches in developing discussion, high quality responses to research questions and creating independent research opportunities. I will continue to conference with my mentor on scaffolding lessons and creating more meaningful assessments of skills at multiple stages of each lesson to check for understanding. This will help me continue to improve my own instructional practices.