

Absolutism Lesson Reflection:

In this lesson students participated in a concept formation lesson in order to develop deep knowledge of absolutism. Through analysis of text students successfully identified similarities and differences between examples. Synthesizing information they were able to identify three critical attributes and create a definition. Using this information they then tested new examples using their critical attributes to identify examples and non-examples. Overall the lesson was a success. Reflecting on this lesson has identified several strengths and weaknesses in my instruction and ability to meet each of the PASS standards. I have a better understanding of improving this lesson and my overall instruction.

Reflecting on the first PASS standard, I would give myself a four. Students were engaged in two activities during the lesson in which they performed higher order thinking. These activities occupied the entire class period and were the focus of the lesson. In the first activity students analyzed a seventeenth-century painting which required them to manipulate visual information in order to transform their meaning and implications. The second activity, forming the concept, required students to build their own knowledge. They discovered new meaning and understandings by analyzing information and creating their own critical attributes and definitions. In the end students were able to hypothesize what defined an absolute ruler and generalize about examples and non-examples.

I assigned a score of four for the second PASS standard, deep knowledge. Students were able to provide their own information, arguments, and reasoning to demonstrate knowledge of the issue. They sustained focus on the topic of absolutism for the entire lesson. Through their assessment, they demonstrated understanding by arriving at a supported conclusion. Students explored examples of absolutism from different countries throughout the Age of Absolutism which spanned ancient history to today. They then identified similarities, differences, and critical attributes to formulate connections and relationships to produce understanding. For their assessment they had to identify examples or non-examples of absolutism. To do this they supported answers with evidence from the text and relationships drawn from the lesson.

I gave myself a three for "Substantive Conversation." Student conversations shared ideas with their partners and other groups. They had constructive arguments over examples and non-examples. While some classes were able to sustain conversations for the bulk of the class, others struggled. This lesson was a new experience for all of them, and at times I was certainly guilty of controlling the conversation and leading deliberation.

I also gave myself a three for "Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom." To understand checks and balances as well as powers and systems of government, the class made connections to the current government of the United States. Students compared absolute monarchies to the presidency and branches of the American government. During their assessment students encountered a contemporary example of absolutism, but few made the connection to what they learned in the lesson, although the opportunity was there.

Once again I assigned a three, this time to PASS standard five, ethical valuing. Students made me more aware of absolutism as a value-based issue than I had originally thought. They were extremely interested in the issues of ruling by divine right, and ruling a country without checks or balances. Their disagreement with absolute monarchies inspired their discussion of voting rights and authentic judiciary systems. Many students discussed these same issues during the assessment. They shared honest dislikes for the absolute monarchy of Mswati III of Swaziland based on democratic values.

Using the rubric for scoring the last standard, integration, I gave my lesson a five. No lesson is perfect, but it did incorporate four types of integration, all of which enhanced social understanding and civic efficacy of students. The lesson was interdisciplinary in that students learned historical content while analyzing and building deeper understanding of systems of government and pillars of democracy. While learning new content, students practiced relevant skills like analysis, synthesis, generalization, deliberation, writing, and forming a hypothesis. The lesson also bridged the past and present while connecting several places. Students encountered ancient history, the age of absolutism, and current events. They also encountered examples from Europe, Asia, and Africa, while making connections to the United States. Lastly, the lesson seamlessly used a document camera to enhance learning and integrate technology.

There are several things I would change if I had the opportunity to teach this lesson again. Due to lack of time, assignments that were expected to be completed in class became homework. Without planning for that, worksheets lacked explicit directions. The document camera worked wonderfully, but it limited my mobility and narrowed my action zone. I also need to increase differentiation. Average and lower-ability students were able to succeed while still being challenged. Several high achieving students sped through the lesson and found it easy. I would be sure to have an alternate set of examples that either contains more examples or more challenging readings with critical attributes that are not as easily identified. Lastly, I would alter the assessment. The reading proved to be too difficult for the majority of students. They did not make the connections I was looking for. I would create an easier version to read, and provide more explicit directions and explain my rubric for grading.

Two large issues were raised by my lesson. The first is that I need to manage my time better. Activities took longer than expected. I also did not stick to times that I assigned for each activity. In the end the lesson was not completed. The other issue I learned is that when students are engaged, they will value the lesson and learn the material. For the most part students enjoyed the lesson and demonstrated good behavior, remained on task, and succeeded in the lesson while learning.