

Cycle 3 Reflection

Cycle 3 had so much great potential but ended up, like many things in this profession (I'm learning), not quite as I originally hoped. Over the previous two cycles, I'd been the host of the lesson, and while it was easier to organize and plan, I was looking forward to being in someone else's class for a change. Ivan was going to lead this cycle, and his lesson plan seemed super interesting too. For Cycle 3, we wanted to look at ***how we could as teachers develop strategies that allow our students to find value in each other and form a larger community of learning.***

In all of our classes, throughout the year, we had seen students become cliquier, less interested in working with others, and less able to see the inherent value that working and collaborating with different kinds of people brings. This is something that I've continued to wrestle with, every time I create a seating chart to the chagrin of my students, or every time I assign partners and break up the cliques in my class. We wanted to create a lesson or a system that not only encouraged students to work with each other (and not just their friends) but were able to see why working with others was important.

Ivan's Model United Nations lesson seemed to fit perfectly with this theme. At his school, HTH Chula Vista, the entire 8th grade was working on preparing for a Model United Nations debate that would happen about two weeks after our Research lesson. Each student was assigned to a country as well as a committee. For example, a student might be assigned to Canada and be on a committee for Global Warming. During Ivan's lesson, we wanted students from different countries to talk to people in their same committees and try to better understand the perspectives, agreements, and differences among them. Ideally, students would need to talk to each other, and understand that only by a real and meaningful discourse could they get to a better understanding of how the world viewed their issue.

Now this was challenging for a host of reasons. For one, the lesson itself demanded a lot from the students. Students were supposed to be well versed in knowing the views of their own countries on their specific issues, and were then given the task to communicate these views effectively. On top of that, students were supposed to be able to compare and contrast how their views differed from the views of their peers who hopefully were also able to be fluent in the views of their respective countries. When I first saw this assignment, I thought it would be difficult to do well with juniors or seniors, let alone with eighth graders. On top of that, it seemed like Ivan was sort of just going along and doing his best with a lesson plan that was being given to him by higher ups, not his own making. The whole thing seemed like a big ask, but we liked the idea of students talking to each other, trying to practice perspective taking, communication, empathy, and deeper learning.

About a week before the lesson was supposed to happen, I got an email from my director that I was supposed to attend a PD the same day as new curriculum was being added to the 9th grade humanities class next year. I was torn, because I was excited to watch and participate in Ivan's lesson, but at the same time, I didn't want to let down my director or my school. Luckily, I

didn't have to make that decision. The night before the lesson, I got food poisoning and ended up not going to either. Luckily one of my teammates, Juan, recorded parts of the lesson allowing me to see what unfolded.

The lesson was in some ways successful and in some ways not. A handful of students took on the challenge, and were invested in trying to communicate with other members of their committee and better understand the views of their peers representing other countries. Most students seemed to be somewhat engaged, but also a bit confused, and not sure exactly what to do. Then there were a handful of students completely unengaged and not participating at all. The two focus students, luckily, were participating and seemed to be able to finish their graphic organizers to somewhat of a completed degree. Ivan let me know that after the lesson, he thought he probably should have split the lesson into two separate lessons and scaffolded the parts more carefully. I agreed but applauded his attempt in trying to engage the students in super cool learning.

I was listening to a podcast recently that explained education as "the non-coercive rearranging of desire". I look at the students in my class, and I see them having very few and very specific desires - look at my phone, talk to my friends, get an A if I can, and leave class. And yet, I know there's so much they could learn from each other if they were given the chance. What this cycle did for me was make me think about how I could create not only assignments but projects and entire systems that encouraged students to learn about each other, learn from each other, and learn with each other in a way that allows them to see how enriching an experience it can be. That's the task at hand.