

Summary of Observation

Throughout my four years of being an educator in fifth grade, I have taught in a cooperative teaching style. My main rationale for using this teaching style is that I feel more comfortable teaching mathematics and science. Another justification is that I do not feel as confident when teaching English and Language Arts, even though I teach writing to my homeroom class. This is my reasoning for focusing my lesson observation on writing. I hope to learn more about why I may struggle with this writing curricula more than I do with our math and science curriculum.

The summary of my writing observations focuses on the inappropriate practice of and overemphasis of reading, writing and math. Armstrong (2006) states that an additional problem with this strong emphasis on reading, writing and math is the significant shift in the ways these subjects are taught (p. 94). When the focus of instruction moves towards a more specific subject area, it limits the opportunity to evenly teach all subjects proportionately.

The importance of writing as a subject should not be overlooked. Armstrong (2006) claims that these powerful symbol systems permit the child to enter into a significant engagement with the world in a new way (p. 94). The necessity and practicality of writing needs to be recognized, but as educators we need to remember to balance our curriculum. Armstrong (2006) agrees with this importance by questioning not whether they should be taught in elementary school—of course they should—but rather to what extent they should form a part of a child's school day (p. 94). The struggle for educators is finding the appropriate amount of time for each subject area to ensure that our students are stimulated through multiple intelligences.

If Thomas Armstrong were observing this lesson, I think there would be points where he would praise this teacher's practices and moments where he would apply constructive feedback. An example of what I think Armstrong would deem as an inappropriate practice would be seen throughout the lesson itself. It is not seen in the lesson itself, but this lesson is thoroughly scripted. Armstrong (2006) warns against this style of teaching, because due to its disconnect from real life and robot world approach.

One area where I believe Armstrong would praise this teacher for their lesson would be the opportunity she provides her students to explore more than just one intelligence area. Armstrong (2006) describes this type of multiple intelligence curricula as courses in a variety of subjects that engage in all eight of their intelligences in real-world avocations (p. 96). I will discuss this more in depth in my reflection, but this lesson is a good example of how students can use multiple intelligences within a single content area.

Overall, I believe this teacher did a fair job introducing the new content to her students. Throughout her lesson I noticed that she utilized turn and talks as a form of formative assessments. One suggestion I would make before hand would be to increase the frequency of the turn and talks to ensure students are staying engaged. In addition, I would advise the teacher to be aware of students not participating in the turn and talks. Armstrong (2006) warns against the ability for students to fly under the radar by reading their teachers, hedging their bets—*anything* to survive in the high-stakes, low-excitement world.

At the beginning of the lesson I noticed the teacher focused on students' prior knowledge of narrative writing. She used scaffolding to connect the method they are about to learn to content they have already been exposed to. For example, she discussed that in fourth grade, students used four boxes when designing the plots of their stories. Now, she took this idea and

connected it to using five boxes in fifth grade when creating their plots. I would take time to praise this teacher for placing an emphasis on this idea at the beginning of the lesson.

Another connection this teacher offers during her lesson is through the pictures she brought to show her students. This presents her students with the opportunity to visualize a key part of the story and give them something tangible. Armstrong (2006) describes students in their elementary years as being “ecstatic pragmatists,” (p. 91). I believe this picture would help to create a more excited environment where students are more likely to share their personal narratives.

One of the last thing I would applaud the teacher for would be modeling of her own personal narrative. Armstrong (2006) claims that many students of this age have crystallizing experiences (p. 92). Her modeling could be an experience for students to become inspired about sharing their own life experiences. In a similar fashion, Armstrong (2006) uses the story of Joseph Lister, who at the time was only ten, noticed a bubble within the glass of a window, which through a series of events, inspired him to discover antiseptic surgery.

These are all points that I believe Armstrong would feel the need to highlight, if he were the person observing this lesson. There are things that could be improved upon, but also several examples that I think are appropriate practices.

References

Armstrong, T. (2006). *Best Schools: How Human Development Research Should Inform Educational Practice*, Alexandria, VA: ASCD.