

PART VI: POST-TEACHING REFLECTION

The strengths of this unit would be that it offers a hands-on experience for the students to learn the concepts presented in the overall unit. There are hands-on lessons for money, trading money, being a producer, and shopping in the class store. Also, it was a very interactive unit in that the students were able to earn money throughout the span of the unit and culminated to the last day in which the students were able to use the money they earned to shop in the class store. Another strength in the unit would be the ability for the students to have discussions as a class and with a partner. It is very important that students share their ideas and opinions with each other in order to offer new ideas for one another. The integration of other subjects into the unit would be considered a strength as well. I was able to incorporate mathematics along with language arts into the overall unit. The mathematics correlated very nicely to the social studies in learning about money and the values of the coins and the important role money plays in our society. Also, I think it offered an authentic experience for the students to earn money and count their money in order to shop for items. The language arts aspect was strong in that we worked on our reading comprehension and they were introduced to information text. Before the “Being a Producer” lesson, the students had not yet been exposed to information text during our language arts time, and the students really enjoyed the story and the idea that it was full of true facts and stories. Overall, I think the major strength of the unit was the authentic lessons that I had for the students to relate it to their lives and connect it to the way economics works in society today.

Some weaknesses of the unit would be time management in my teaching and pacing throughout my lessons. I am still working on my pacing in where I focus a lot of my time. Many times I spend too much time on a certain part of a lesson and not enough time on a later part where the students would benefit from more time. Also, in regards to time management, I think I underestimated the amount of time it would take for certain lessons, like the shopping in the store or even the needs and wants activity. Another weakness that I think I would want to improve if I taught this lesson again, would be the set up of the class store. I felt that activity was extremely beneficial for the students, but I felt that I was unorganized with it and rushed through it. I didn’t have a lot of time to set up the store and I felt that sometimes I was rushing the students through their purchases. In the future I would maybe break up the shopping into two different days or two different time slots in the day. It was very hectic to do it all in one straight time span, and I felt the students were restless during the time that they were waiting to shop.

Throughout the unit there were some highs and lows. I think one of the lows would be when my intensive student still did not understand the concept of a need. I had integrated the idea of a need and a want in almost every lesson that I made and would review it at the beginning of every lesson, and still my one boy could not get it. When I would ask the students as a group what a need was, his hand would go up and he would say “x-box” or “movies”, and I would always respond with “Can you survive or live if you don’t have those things?” then I would call on a student who didn’t have those things and ask them if they were still alive even though they didn’t have an x-box or a movie. He would nod his head and understand for that day, but then the next day would come around and he would have a similar response. It was very frustrating for me, because I tried to explain it to him in terms of animals or other people in the room, and he still would not give me the correct answers to what a need is. However, I think one of my major highs in the unit came towards the end when we were talking about producers and consumers and the goods and services that were made or bought. I asked that student if a person makes a car if that car is a need or a want, and he told me it was a want. I asked him why it was a want in case he was just making a guess, and he gave me the correct answer in that people don’t need cars to keep them alive. I don’t know what happened that day, but it seemed the concept just started clicking with that student and it was a very exciting day for him and for me! I think another high in the unit came when the students were able to be producers and make some items for the store. It was a fun and interactive afternoon and the students were so excited to be making something. They wanted to make more key chains and bookmarks to sell to the other class. As the students produced their goods, I would review with them by asking if

they were making items that were needs or wants, why they were producers, if they were producing a good or a service, and what they were trading their time for. The class answered all of the questions appropriately and worked well that afternoon. It was almost a calming activity in that they were able to do something with their hands and produce an item that they were proud of. I made sure to tell them to take their time with it, because it would be sold in the class store for the other first grade room. Since other people were going to buy their items they really took their time to make it neat.

My cooperating teacher appreciated the unit I did since it would be the only social studies that the students would be formally taught in the year. She did not offer too many comments about the unit other than the fact that she liked my lessons and felt they were very beneficial and that she was impressed with how well the students were doing with it. For example, she was impressed with how the students really picked up the terminology of producers and consumers and could explain what each one meant. Also, she was impressed with their ability to count their coins and understand the value of money.

Some things I would do differently would be the logistics of the class store. I mentioned before how I would do the store at a different time in the day so that I would have it all set up and ready to go after a lunch time or specials in order to get all the items out on the tables and the work for the students to complete all set up in an orderly fashion. Also, I think I would do the money section differently in that I would break it up into two days. It was too much information for one day for the students, and they were confusing the values of some of the coins. I think I would take one day to review the coin and the values one day, and then the next day to introduce the new coins and read the Shell Silverstein poem. That way it would give the students more time to practice making values with each coin.

What I learned from the unit is that it is very hard to come up with original ideas for a unit when you don't have a curriculum for it. It was very beneficial to work with the other first-grade intern in that we could share ideas and build off of each others ideas. I also learned the benefits of working as a team with another teacher. With the other intern we were able to exchange ideas about what worked and didn't work in our rooms with our students and how we could improve or review some topics that the students struggled with. Another thing I learned from teaching the unit was the importance of organization and time management. It is very easy to lose track of how much time you are spending on an activity and how effective it is to be organized. For example, when I wasn't very organized for the store it took a lot of time to get everything set up and get the students shopping. However, for my lesson on money, I was very organized which helped me breeze through the lesson and take time to practice on the concepts the students were struggling with the most.

What I learned about my students during the unit was that they really do benefit and enjoy hands-on activities. The students were very excited on the days when they were producers and made key chains and bookmarks, or when they got to shop in the store, or when they were able to use the plastic coins and make various values at their desks. It made it easier for me to relate my questions to what we did and it was easier for them to remember what they did, because it was such a break from our usual routine of everything that we do. The unit really broke up our day nicely and was a change of pace for our day. I also learned that my students can handle hands-on activities and that there weren't too many behavioral issues. Many times my mentor would be worried about using manipulative or hands-on activities, because she doesn't trust the maturity of our students. I made sure that when we worked with supplies that we do not usually work with, that I explicitly stated my expectations of them and told them of the consequences if they did not follow directions. This helped in keeping the behavior manageable.

What I learned about teaching is that it is okay if my students do not pick everything up right away. I was getting down on the fact that some of my students were having difficulty with the idea of a need, or some of the students who were struggling with counting their money; but I had to put it into perspective that everyone learns at a different pace and that I cannot expect all of them to understand the

concepts at the same time. It takes longer for information to just “click” with some of my students, and others pick up new concepts right away. I learned that I need to balance new information with previous information that we learned and that I should not take for granted the review time that I set aside at the beginning and end of every lesson. Many of my students need that review time at the beginning in order to activate their brains to get ready for a new concept. My student who didn’t get the idea of a need until the sixth day of the unit is a perfect example of this. He needed the reviews that we did every day. Also, with counting money, another of my boys had a difficult time remembering the values of the coins, and needed the review time at the beginning of math. Also, I realized how beneficial it would be to have the coins on the board with their values written next to them and put that up on the third day of the unit. This helped serve as a resource for my students throughout the unit and even after we completed the social studies unit. Another thing I learned about teaching was the importance of discussions and teachable moments. During our needs discussion a student felt that education was a need and we had a great group discussion about why they thought it was a need and why some students thought it was a want. I had students from each side explain why they thought the way they did and I told them that if they could validate their reasoning that they could keep it in whichever column they agreed with. One of my students explained that it was a need; because in order to do things you need to learn and know how to do them and that they couldn’t get a job if they didn’t learn things, and then they wouldn’t have money to buy food, which is a need. I felt that was a very sophisticated argument, especially coming from a first grader. Then another student said that they felt it was a want, because his baby sister doesn’t go to school and is still alive, which I felt was valid as well. I explained that there are things that are situational in that sometimes they pertain and something they do not. School and education would be one of those things that would be border line, along with friends and family. The students did a great job explaining themselves and it was a great teachable moment that I was able to explain that sometimes there are gray areas and topics that are debatable.

The unit was an overall success and I feel that my students really took a great deal of information and experiences from it. I was very proud of the work they had done throughout the unit and of how well they did with the culminating activity. This is definitely a unit that I would want to use again in the future.