

## Biography Unit Reflection Inquiry 5

During Guided Lead Teaching, I taught a Biography Unit to my 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grade split class. Throughout the first week, students were discovering and learning the basic elements of a biography. The second week was geared mainly towards the preparation of writing a biography about someone in their family. For instance, I planned lessons on how to select a person to write about, the types of appropriate interview questions, how to interview an individual, and the author's role in a biography. I would have then led the students through the writing processes, in which they would have all had a published, final draft of the biography they wrote in book form. The following "I can" statements were the focus of my unit:

- I can identify and describe the basic elements, features, and purposes of a biography.
- I can replicate the elements, features, and purposes of a biography when writing my own biography.
- I can adjust my language to communicate effectively with another person, by interviewing them to gather significant information about their life.
- I can listen knowledgeably while demonstrating appropriate social skills of audience behaviors (e.g. eye contact, attentive, supportive) in a one on one setting.

However, I was only able to teach six of my ten lessons I had planned. As a result, students only learned the first "I can" statement. My Biography Unit was cut short, due to the dissolving of my 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> split class. My CT and I quickly prepared to

take over the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade class, which had a permanent substitute teacher teaching the class up until we took over.

Prior to teaching my Biography Unit, I gave each of my 18 students a pre-assessment. I asked the students the following three questions: 1. What is a biography? 2. What comes to mind when you hear the word biography? 3. Can you name any biographies? At this point, I had 6 students who were unable to answer the first question (What is a biography?). There were 11 students whose response was somewhat correct and only 1 student who answered the question completely correct. For the third question, 11 students were unable to name a biography, while 7 students could provide an example of a biography. After giving the pre-assessment, it was evident the majority of my students were not accurately knowledgeable on biographies.

With the time I had, I taught my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Graders the major elements of biographies. On the first day, the students were to work in small groups, to explore the biographies in their book boxes. They were to prepare a list of common elements and features they noticed in the biographies. There were many elements I believed these students would have not understood on their own. This being, that biographies are written in third person, they only include facts about the person's life which are told in chronological order, timelines can be displayed horizontally or vertically, and biographies include significant details and events from the person's life. Each day, I would teach a mini lesson focusing on one of these elements. I would also have at least two activities for the students to work on during their Literacy Centers. I always planned one individual and one teacher led small group activity. These activities supported the topic of the mini lesson. The assignments I created, focused on developing a better

understanding of the concept, in addition to learning how the topic is connected to biographies. My summative assessment of this unit was to have the students write their own biography, implementing the elements of a biography.

When my unit came to an end, I gave my students a post-assessment. This included the same three questions from the pre-assessment. By this point, everyone could answer the questions. In addition, most of the students were able to expand upon their previous responses. There were 5 students who partly knew the definition of a biography and 11 students who correctly answered what a biography is. In addition, every student was able to name a biography. When comparing the results of the pre and post-assessments, I found there to be much growth and understanding over the week I taught biographies.

I believe my Biography Unit went very well. The students really seemed to be engaged in the activities I had planned and in reading the biographies. They were also very excited to write a biography about someone in their family. It was disappointing to me that the students were not able to complete this unit, since they were so enthusiastic about it.

When planning this unit, I conscientiously thought of ways in which I could keep my students engaged. I tried to use concrete examples in order for students to better understand the material. In addition, I strived to connect the activities as much as possible to the student's lives. I implemented this in a variety of ways. For instance, when showing examples of sentences to reinforce a concept, I would write about topics of interest to the students. Also, the students put events from their own life in

chronological order. Lastly, when teaching the concept of significant and insignificant, we sorted items commonly found in the student's desks.

I taught my unit by beginning each day with a mini lesson. The students then worked in Literacy Centers. Two of the Literacy Centers were focused on biographies, an independent assignment and a teacher led group. I would call a group of students with a similar ability level, to work with me at the back table for additional practice with using the concepts of the mini lesson. I found these teacher led activities took much longer than I expected. The students had many more comments and questions than I expected. I believe it takes much experience to predict just the right amount of time an activity will take. In addition, I found it difficult to attend to all the student's needs and questions when I was sitting at the teacher led center.

Reflecting upon the lessons I taught, I noted a few changes I would make to the unit for the next time. Firstly, I would changed the second question on the pre and post-assessment from, "What comes to mind when you hear the word biography?" to "What are some elements of a biography?" This question would be easier to monitor student's growth. I found it very difficult to detect improvement from the responses to a question that asks you what comes to mind when hearing the word biography. There really cannot be a right and wrong answer when it's asking you what comes to your mind. Another slight change I would make to my timeline lesson is that I would review the steps in making a timeline with my whole class. This would improve the spacing and neatness of the timeline. Lastly, I might give the students a Venn diagram instead of a T-chart as a way of sorting items in their desk, as being significant or insignificant to their everyday

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learning. Overall, I truly enjoyed teaching this unit and will utilize much of it again in the future.