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Curriculum Project Proposal

ED 200

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Developing Writing through Theater Arts

Introduction and Context

Demographics such as socio economic factors and high concentrations of non-home owning and immigrant residents contribute to the failures of lack of resources and inadequate teaching methods in urban Hartford public schools. Because families who live in these types of neighborhoods rarely own their homes, the city is not able to collect a sufficient amount of taxes to help fund certain programs at local schools. This lack of funds then leads to budget cuts that erase certain fundamental programs that will help create equality between students of higher and lower socio economic statuses. In addition to the lack of resources in urban public schools in Hartford, students who attend those schools tend to be tracked or forced by school officials to take classes that will lead them to a specific future. For instance, a child may be tracked into becoming a factory worker through the prevention of access to advanced or honors leveled classes that other students have. Being that a lot of students in urban Hartford classrooms, the unit we have created will focus on bridging the gap that has been wedged between educations for students of high and low socio economic statuses providing those of the low status the means to have equal opportunities.

This unit will focus on strengthening the writing skills of Hartford Public school children, specifically those who attend school in low income neighborhoods, through the use of theater
Students will begin the unit by watching a scene from “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald while reading that scene from a transcript of the film or the book itself. This will happen so students can familiarize themselves with the elements of a play. Then, they will be asked to collaboratively writing a play for the class to perform which will include language arts skills that will be taught. After being taught the different skills and how they apply to theater, students will learn different artistic techniques such as sketching so they can create props for their production. Finally, the class will then practice and perform the play that they created for their teacher and other staff members (e.g. assistant principal or principal).

Our goal for this series of lessons is to allow an equal opportunity for students to be involved in the classroom regardless of past tracking efforts. If they are placed into groups with a balance of lower track students and higher track students, then all the groups are able to work on the same level. Not only will they be learning the material, but they will also be teaching it to their classmates as a way of proving their expertise in the newly learned subject. This encourages all students to work hard and be held at the same accountability for their work as a way of de-tracking. Working on this specific topic of theatre arts and writing allows a combination of writing, art, and theatre skills to be learned. Our reason for integrating these skills is to teach the basic elements of writing while providing fun activities for the students to be enthusiastic about and also learn from.

**Context:**

Our target class is that of twenty 8th graders in an urban Hartford public school. The lessons will take place in their classroom for 90 minutes per lesson. According to the lesson, we
will make changes in the class. For example, during the lesson on artistic technique in theatre arts we will push desks to the side of the classroom, creating space for an interactive lesson.

The ideal Hartford school that this lesson is intended for is one that 1) lacks a developed art department or a school wide art program, 2) has a low percentage of students writing according to the mechanics of Standard English, and 3) divides students into groups based on monitored performance. The unit has an emphasis on developing lacking English Language Arts skills through elements of theater. It is expected that these students will use those tools to create a play that displays and encourages hard work.

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

1. Learn how to collaborate with one another to create one final project
   
   a. Since students are often divided based on ability and performance, we will place students of high, average and low performance in a group in attempt to develop social relations among them and undo some tracking practices. Students tend to be placed in classes and groups based on how well they perform on exams. By placing low achieving students with high achieving students, we hope that all students will be learning at the same level and pace.

2. Access their linguist intelligence through practicing and performing both their oral and written expressions

3. Demonstrate what they have learned through writing a script that reflects the mechanics and structure of writing learned as well as create props using the drawing techniques demonstrated
a. Both objectives 2 and 3 will help us to gear students towards expressing themselves properly through written and spoken word. Students who attend urban public schools tend to speak the vernacular that is not used in schools or the professional word. Their lack of ability to express them properly is a problem that we hope to correct through having the students learn different rules of grammar and Standard English writing.

4. Build confidence about their work due to the opportunity they have to make presentations
   a. Being that some students tend to be labeled as problem students or lower leveled students, we hope to build these students confidence in their school work through the production of their play before school faculty. This method will hopefully remove some of the effects of tracking on students by giving them the confidence to work harder.

After seeing how the jigsaw model works in Robert Slavin’s “Explanation of Cooperative Learning”, we realized that using this model will help students better understand the different writing techniques and components of writing a play. We will use this model by having groups of students learn several different techniques and teach their newly gained knowledge to the rest of their class. Another purpose is that students score below average in language arts on the CMTs. If they are exposed to different expressive methods, they will be able to be more creative and enrich their writing skills. Our thematic unit relies upon the ideas of Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences, specifically Linguistic Intelligence. Linguistic Intelligence involves having the ability to master spoken and written language and to use it to complete a specific task. According to Gardner’s research, writers and speakers are included in those who have high linguistic intelligence. Being that our students will be focusing on writing
scripts and presenting them to school staff, having students tap into this intelligence is an objective as well.

According to Connecticut Public School educational standards, 8th graders are expected to “Use sentence patterns typical of spoken and written language to produce text... Recognize the difference between standard and nonstandard English and use language appropriately... Demonstrate proficient use of proper mechanics, usage and spelling skills... Use resources for proofreading and editing” within the ELA context. Within the Theater standards, Connecticut requires that students gain the ability to “explain how social concepts such as cooperation, communication, collaboration, consensus, self-esteem, risk taking, sympathy and empathy applying theatre and daily life.”

Activities:

Lesson #1: Students will watch the scene in their classroom entitled “Tom’s Confrontation” from The Great Gatsby while reading its transcript. The Great Gatsby is a novel written by F. Scott Fitzgerald that is surrounded around the various attempts of the love-struck Gatsby to get his one true love, Daisy to fall back in love with him and return to his side. The dramatic scene takes place in a city during hot weather. The main character, Gatsby, reveals his past relationship and current love for Daisy to her husband, Tom. This causes her to confess that she never loved him. After watching the scene, students will be broken up into four groups of five students with students of different learning levels. Each group will be given a specific reading with the different elements of writing and grammar that are essential to playwrights. For example, the different groups will have a grammar topic that they need to make their writing
These topics are: identifying subjects and verbs, forming complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun-antecedent agreement. After reading and explaining to each other the important parts of the specific element they were given, the group will present that knowledge to the rest of the class. Students from other groups will take notes on that topic. If the group presenting has a misunderstanding of a certain point, the teacher will give guidance and correction so that group as well as the rest of the class may be able to grasp a full understanding.

Lesson #2: The purpose of this lesson is for the students to collaboratively create a play. As a whole, the class will brainstorm different themes for the play they want to write. After taking a vote on the best theme for the play, the students will outline the scenes of the play without going into specific details. Once this is complete, the students will be placed into groups, by random, where they will work on writing a 3-4 minute scene for the play which they will perform. The scenes will be assigned by the teacher randomly to avoid conflict in the class about which group wants which scene. After each group gets their scene, they will be trusted to decide the character split up. However, if the teacher sees that they cannot agree or that it is taking too much time to do this, then the teacher will step in and make the decision. During the writing of the play, the teacher will walk around and offer assistance as needed. The scripts for each group will be expected to be handed in to the teacher on this day so that the teacher can make comments and return it the next day for editing.

Lesson #3: The students will start their lesson by working on the edits that the teacher provided them with for their play. The teacher will briefly begin by using one of the scenes as an example
and showing how to edit their writing. After this mini lesson is finished, students will return to their groups to make edits to their own scenes and produce their final product. Since the scenes are relatively short, this portion should take up no more than half the class time. For the second half of the class, the classroom setting in this lesson will be different from that of the other lessons. All desks will be pushed to the back of the classroom while all the students gather around a sheet that is spread in the middle of the classroom. Students will begin this portion of the lesson by brainstorming what props they think they will need for their play. Every group will be able to decide on one or two things that they want to work on. After the preliminary decisions are made, the students will then turn their attention to their teacher for a mini lesson. During the lesson, students will be taught the different drawing and painting techniques they could use in creating the props for their play. Some of these techniques include water colors, sketching, and acrylic painting.

Lesson #4: On the fourth lesson day, the students will put what they learned the day before into practice. This day will be dedicated to creating their props. The teacher will spend a maximum of five minutes refreshing their memories of the techniques they learned the day before. Once the students fully remember and understand the techniques presented by their teacher, they retreat to the groups they were placed in for the jigsaw model. In these groups students will create the props they want to use for their scene. The props will be very simple so that they can be completed in a period. For example, one group may want to make cut outs of a sun and clouds paint them. After preparing their props, the students may use any extra time to practice their scenes in their groups. Although they can learn their lines at home, it is important that they are given enough class time to interact with their group member. We want to give
students a sense of responsibility but do not want to overwhelm them with a lot of work to do on their own.

Lesson #5: This lesson will be solely devoted to practicing for the first hour. The students will be given some time to rehearse their scenes before they present it to their teacher and other school faculty. This time will also be used to set up their set with the props that they worked on. The teacher will signal to the class that time to rehearse is over and that it is time to present their play. Once the faculty arrives, the students will present their play to them. As a reward for their hard work, students will be given a pizza party.

**Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated differently for each portion of the lesson. For the first part of the lesson which includes the grammar sections, students will be evaluated based on their ability to first teach the members of their group and then teach what they learned to their other classmates. The fact that students are able to articulate what they have learned in a manner that others understand shows that they are able to comprehend the material, which in turn proves their learning.

The art portion of the unit will be evaluated by their products. After learning all the techniques that they need, the students will be observed on how well they duplicate the techniques to create their props. The students’ ability to do this shows that they have learned the lesson that the teacher had previously taught, and they have put that lesson into practice.
The final portion of the unit is theatre. It will be evaluated orally. There will be a ten-minute feedback session where the faculty that watched the play provide comments on what they think went well or didn’t. The students will be given an opportunity to participate in this feedback section. They will be asked to say how they felt about the play, what the hardest and easiest parts were, and what they think they could do to improve if they were to do the unit again.
Appendix

Tom’s Confrontation

Gatsby: I’ve got something to tell you, old sport-

Daisy: Please don’t! Please let’s all go home. Why don’t we all go home?

Tom: I want to know what Mr. Gatsby has to tell me.

Gatsby: Your wife doesn’t love you! She never loved you. She loves me.

Tom: You must be crazy.

Gatsby: She never loved you, did you hear? She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart, she never loved any one expect me!

Tom: Sit down, Daisy. What has been going on? I want to hear all about it.

Gatsby: I told you what has been going on. Going on for five years- and you didn’t know.

Tom: You’ve been seeing this fellow for five years?

Gatsby: Not seeing. No, we couldn’t meet. But both of us loved each other all that time, old sport, and you didn’t know. I used to laugh sometimes to think that you didn’t know.

Tom: Oh- that’s all. I can’t speak about what happened five years ago, because I didn’t know Daisy then- and I’ll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her unless you brought the groceries to the back door. But all the rest of that’s a hot damned. Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now.

Gatsby: No

Tom: She does though. The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn’t know what she’s doing. And what more, I loved Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart, I love her all the time.

Daisy: You’re revolting! (To Gatsby) Do you know why we left Chicago? I’m surprised that they didn’t treat you to the story of that little piece.

Gatsby: Daisy, that’s all over now. It doesn’t matter anymore. Just tell him the truth- that you never loved him, and it’s wiped out forever.

Daisy: Why- how could I love him- possibly?

Gatsby: You never loved him.

Daisy: (With reluctance) I never loved him.

Tom: Not at Kapiolani?

Daisy: No.
Core Parts of a Sentence

There are two core parts of a sentence: the subject and the verb. Your ability to identify the subject and the verb in a sentence will result in your ability to write complete sentences (as opposed to fragments).

Identifying the Subject

The subject of a sentence refers to who or what is doing something.

HINT

To identify the subject of a sentence, ask yourself “who or what is doing the action?”

Example #1

The president closed the college due to the heat.
Reasoning: The subject of this sentence is “president” since it is the president who was doing something (closing the college).

Example #2

The dog barked for a long time.
Reasoning: The subject of the sentence is “dog” since it was the dog who was doing something (barking).

Try the exercises on subjects!

Exercise 1 | Exercise 2

Identifying the Verb

In most sentences, the verb is the word that indicates WHAT is being done or the action that is being taken.

HINT

To identify the verb in a sentence, ask yourself “what is the action?” or “what is being done here?” In some sentences, though, the verb is a “state of being.” The verb “to be” in all its forms is an example of this.

Example #1

The president closed the college due to the heat.
Reasoning: The verb in this sentence is “closed” since that is what is being done and that was the action being taken.

Example #2

The dog barked for a long time.
Reasoning: The verb in this sentence is “barked” since this is what was being done and that was the action taken.

Example #3

It is sunny today.
Reasoning: There is no action here; however, the verb denotes a state of being or tells what is happening in the sentence with the word “is.”
Subject-Verb Agreement

**Note: This section will only make sense if you are able to identify a subject and a verb. If you are unable to do so, click on instructions for subjects and verbs.**

What is subject-verb agreement?

Subject-verb agreement refers to ensuring that singular subjects have singular verbs, and plural subjects have plural verbs. This is called agreement in number, and it refers specifically to verbs in the present tense.

When I write a sentence, how can I make sure the subject agrees with the verb?

Identify your subject, and then ask yourself, "Is my subject singular or plural?" Then identify your verb and ask yourself, "Is my verb singular or plural?" If they are both the same, you have subject-verb agreement. If they aren’t, you have subject-verb disagreement and must change either your subject or your verb so that both are singular or both are plural.

Since the verb is usually right next to the subject, why would anyone make a subject-verb agreement error?

When the verb immediately follows the subject (such as in the sentence "He climbs the tree"), it is easy to have subject verb agreement. Sometimes, though, there is a clause or a phrase between the subject and the verb, and then it is easy to make a subject-verb agreement error. In fact, sometimes even when the subject agrees with the verb, it sounds incorrect because of the position of other words.

**HOT GRAMMAR TIP**

Generally speaking, regular verbs that are singular take an "s" at the end while plural verbs do not. Examples: *She jumps rope. He studies hard. It stays the same.* You may want to keep this in mind while proofreading your sentences in your own essays to see if you have subject-verb agreement errors.

Example #1 (Subject-Verb—disagreement)

*The dirty dishes sitting in the kitchen sink needs to be washed.*

Example #1 (Corrected)

*The dirty dishes sitting in the kitchen sink need to be washed.*

Reasoning: The original sentence (Example #1) contains a plural subject (dishes) and a singular verb (needs). Again, the singular noun (sink) immediately preceding the singular verb (needs) might lead the writer to mistakenly believe that the subject is "sink," and, thus, select a singular verb.
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun takes the place of a noun and sometimes refers to a noun.

Example #1

He is riding a bike through the park.
Reasoning: The word “he” is a pronoun because it takes the place of a person (e.g., John, David, Stephen).

Example #2

The weather is great today; let’s make the most of it by going to the beach.
Reasoning: The word “it” is a pronoun because it refers to the weather.

What is an antecedent?

An antecedent is a noun to which the pronoun refers. It usually goes before the pronoun (“ante” means before).

Example #1

Even though the party was fun, it was crowded.
Reasoning: “It” is the pronoun because it refers to the noun “party.” And “party” is the antecedent because “party” is the noun to which “it,” the pronoun, refers.

Example #2

People often like parties because they get to see old friends.
Reasoning: “They” refers to “people” and is, therefore, the pronoun. “People” is the antecedent because “people” is the noun to which “they” refers.

What is pronoun-antecedent agreement?

Pronoun-antecedent agreement is when the pronoun agrees in number (referring to singular or plural) and person (referring to first, second, or third person) with its antecedent.

HOT GRAMMAR TIP

When you check your own sentences to determine if the pronouns agree with their antecedents in both number and person, look first for what the antecedent is. Then match the antecedent with a pronoun that is consistent in number (if the pronoun is singular, the antecedent should also be singular. Then identify the person of the antecedent (first, second, or third person) and then match the pronoun in person.

Example #1 (Pronoun-Antecedent Disagreement - Number)

When an employee does not agree with their boss’s decision, the employee should not support that decision.
Reasoning: This sentence contains an antecedent and a pronoun. Since the antecedent (employee) is singular and the pronoun (their) is plural, the pronoun disagrees with the antecedent, thus containing a pronoun-antecedent agreement error. You can correct this in one of two ways; either make both the pronoun and antecedent singular, or make both the pronoun and antecedent plural.

Example #1 (Corrected)

When an employee does not agree with his boss’s decision, the employee should not support that decision.

Example #2 (Pronoun-Antecedent Disagreement - Person)

Everyone should make their own decision.
Reasoning: This sentence contains an antecedent (everyone) and a pronoun (their). Since the antecedent is third person and singular (everyone), the pronoun (they) should also be third person and singular; instead, “they” is third person and plural.

Example #2 (Corrected)

Everyone should make his or her own decision.
Sentences

What is a sentence?

A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought; it is an independent clause that contains a subject and a verb.

Example #1 (Sentence)

*I feel very sluggish today.*
Reasoning: This sentence contains a subject (I) and a verb (feel) in the main clause. It contains a complete thought that lets us know what is happening (someone feels very sluggish).

When is a group of words NOT a sentence?

A group of words is not a sentence when it is missing one or more of the following: a subject, a verb, a complete thought. We call this an incomplete sentence or a fragment.

Example #2 (Not a sentence.)

*Very sluggish today.*
Reasoning: This group of words does not contain a subject or a verb, and there is not a complete thought. To have a subject, we would have to ask *who or what is very sluggish today?* and we would have to add a verb such as *is* or *feels* in order for this group of words to make sense.

HOT GRAMMAR TIP

There are two ways to determine if a group of words is a complete sentence.

1. If you can identify the subject, the verb, and a complete thought.
2. Say the group of words out loud as if you are addressing someone and see if it makes sense. If it does not make sense, chances are good that it is not a complete sentence.

Example: If someone said to us: "Is very sluggish today," that would not make sense because we don’t know WHO are WHAT might be sluggish today.
Sources

