

MARTHA ANDREWS AND BEVERLY FALK REFLECT ON THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN THE COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES PROJECT

On “walking around”:

While kids are working at tables, I walk around and sort of check in with kids. I have specific kids who I know I need to talk with first. While we're doing whole-group things, they're really good at staying on task. If I feel like things are going in a different direction than I had planned, I can usually ask questions that get us back on track. Yesterday, it was great because we were taking on these dramatic roles of townspeople and questioning them as townspeople. I'm going to try that today.

On the use of meetings as a means of assessment:

Each week we have an all-school meeting in the cafeteria and every older kid has a younger buddy and they sit together and each class is in charge of running the all-school meeting once every couple of months. We talked a lot about what we wanted to do because when you run the meeting you're sharing something from your classroom. The main thing going on with us is all this colonial stuff and we thought about introducing ourselves in the jobs that we have. And I went home that night and thought, “Our kindergarteners are not going to get what a blacksmith does,” so I came back and talked to them about considering our audience, and it worked really well. We talked about how one of the things that kindergarteners might understand is comparing today to 250 years ago, so we made a big chart of the things we have today and what they had two hundred and fifty years ago instead, and then we developed a script from that, it was more of a narration, and then action, with lots of props, because they decided that kindergarteners would be really engaged with props. It was really great. I was talking to a colleague about it, and one of the homework assignments that I give when I'm not sure that kids are deeply understanding a math concept or something, is “imagine explaining adding fractions to a kindergartener, write about what you would say and what pictures you would show them,” and this was a similar thing, only way more authentic.

Assessment to inform instruction:

- I've definitely adjusted some of my expectations about how in depth the kids' knowledge needs to be about, for example, daily life in colonial times. They have some level, and I feel like they have enough knowledge about that to do the work that I really want them to be doing, thinking about other people's perspectives and ways of expressing opinions and convincing people of things, and so yesterday we actually put on a performance for the whole school that showed the differences between today and two-hundred and fifty years ago, and so I feel like the work we've done is enough. We could go on and on and on....

- **Falk:** Did you use the work along the way to help shape what you were going to do subsequently?

Andrews: Yes. They'd done a lot of reflective writing in their notebooks about whether to go to war, and reasons to go to war, and what kinds of egregious things that the English were doing, and I sort of got to this point where I felt like they're only seeing this one side, and no one's looking to say, “There's a reason the British were doing these

things,” and “There’s a reason for us to continue being loyal to the British,” and so that was one of the things that where, towards the end, I asked them to do both sides, because I wasn’t positive that they were getting both sides. The other thing I did was in the very beginning. . . we had done some reading about the time period, they had all created their characters, but I wasn’t convinced yet that they knew how different the time period was, and that’s a really hard concept even for a fifth grader to understand, what it was like 250 years ago, so we put together a presentation for the whole school, and we generated that together as a class, and we did some research, and we used the Colonial Williamsburg website, and the books that they had read and that we had in the class, and so we generated this huge list of “Long Ago” and “Now” and I felt like that really helped to built some more background for them.

On using different forms/styles of assessment:

- I find that with this group of kids, they’re generally pretty motivated as a whole. They come with a wide range of abilities, so their excitement is not necessarily different but their capacity is different, so with some of those kids, we put them in slightly larger groups, so that they have both peer support, and then also my intern and I will more likely to get to those larger groups of kids. The first set of materials we gave them we included pictures, and a glossary, and writing, so that they had a couple of different ways that they were gathering their information.

- I see a series of three events. I think that if kids are being asked to show their final learning in a variety of ways, then we need to practice, to have some exposure to what those different ways are, so we might have some other actions that we might take. We’ll look at some of the colonists’ reactions, so instead of just having a town meeting, every group will make a political cartoon, or write a speech.

- One of the things about having kids present things in multiple ways is the hope that they can access their different skills. One particular kid I have is a real struggling reader, when we do drama work, can improvise really well, when he’s given a script, it’s much more difficult for him to handle, because he has this whole text thing that he has to negotiate, but in terms of improvising, he’s really strong. I hope he chooses to do a speech, and he can have a few notes, and present a speech, because that’s been something that he’s really good at. I also hope from some other kids who are stronger academically, that they’ll choose to take on a more challenging perspective, perhaps of a slave, and really get into that, and really explore the complexities of that. (Featured in video included on website)

On progress reports:

Andrews: Starting in second grade, they write their own progress reports, and respond to their teachers’ progress reports, so there’s this sense that your teacher is not the only authority on who you are. You need to take some responsibility for that too.

Falk: What do you do with the two progress reports?

Andrews: I’ve done different things; I’ve had them write one, and then I’ve written one, then I’ll compare the two. I’ve written a report and asked them if they agree or disagree. This past time they had a paper with two sides. On one side I had them say five things they were doing well, and three things they needed to work on. Then they had to read my

progress report and put down what Martha said you were doing well, and three things Martha had said you needed to work on. For the most part, they were pretty right on.

On rubrics:

The class usually creates the rubric, and so, I can see the class creating the rubric for a few things that apply to all projects, and then all kids who are going to make political cartoons get together and make a list of other criteria that the political cartoons will have, and all the kids who are doing skits get together, and all of those guided by myself and the intern in the classroom. Which is another reason why I can conceive of so many options, because I have another adult who's in the classroom with me now.

On expectations:

- My expectations change a lot. Frequently my kids really surprise me in terms of their level of engagement. When they're really engaged, then I know that I can have high expectations for them. When the kids were introducing themselves to each other as their colonial characters, we ended up having a sort of, everyone was walking around the room, everyone was meeting each other, taking notes about each others' jobs, and it turned out to be a really deep learning experience, because they repeated their introduction so many times that they got really into what they were saying about their jobs and what information they had. They definitely exceeded my expectations, my expectations were that everyone would learn a little something about what everybody else does. . .

- That went really well and after 45-40 minutes of walking around and introducing themselves, we came back to the rug and talked about how they all depend on each other and how we're all connected and we sort of drew this whole web of interdependence, and that was a concept that I was planning on three lessons later, getting to.

On "revisiting":

We did a lot of revisiting the things we had done...there were points in the study where I felt like "we're doing this over again," but in the end I think it actually helped to solidify kids' understanding, and it also helped to get us back to where we were when we took a break.

On what students have learned:

I feel like they have a really solid understanding of the [colonial] time period. And it also helped to reinforce their understanding the ways that the American government works relative to other governments. At one point, it was very cool, we were talking about Parliament and how Parliament was structured, and the kids went back in their notebook to the beginning of the year when we were doing an election study, and talking about the branches of government in the United States and they were doing some comparing, and that was actually something that was very surprising, and pleasant, and a good reason to advocate for all Social Studies work being in one place; they all had their notebooks right there and they all went back and said, look, remember we talked about who could vote, and everyone went back to their notebook and looked at that, and we were sort of looking

back and forth. That was surprising to me that they were able to make connections all the way back to September.

A lot of these kids I've had for two years, and so if I looked back to fall, two years ago, I'd think, there's a huge difference. I think particularly in their writing, to see kids, happily sit down and write two pages about a made-up experience they had with another British citizen, and to use paragraphs, and in the first paragraph to set the scene, and a lot of their work definitely shows that they've developed an understanding of narrative and of ways to be good writers, and we spend *so* much time talking about that, that it's gratifying to see it come out in places where we're not necessarily instructing just to that.