

Overview

Planning

Colonial Perspectives
Project

Assessment

Reflection

Martha Andrews
5th Grade5th Grade Social
Studies Curriculum

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Reflections

Throughout this project, Andrews and Falk talked about a number of issues including the culture of the school and classroom, the role of assessment in planning, and the process of inquiry and reflection. This page includes Falk's overall reflections on the class and its relevance for a course for preservice teachers she teaches at City College.

From Andrews:

How do you feel, looking back on the unit? Were your goals met?

- Students formed and expressed their opinions about the material, learned to listen to others' perspectives, and did meaningful role playing (video).
- It's still a struggle to solicit honest reflections from students (video).

What did you learn while teaching this unit?

- The importance of dramatic play (1 min. video).

What advice do you have for other teachers?

- Try to see the successful parts of your teaching and the students' work (video).

From Falk's notes:

What are some of the distinguishing features of Martha's practice?

- Extended studies are developed around the content required in state standards. Martha does not develop these alone. She plans in concert with her grade-level team. In addition, for discipline-specific plans she is supported by the school's cross-grade discipline-based teams.

- This study, as well as others in the school, features active learning experiences such as projects, dramatic play (for example, in the Colonial America study, students each assume the role of a townspeople), trips, cooking and other engaging activities.

- Teaching is informed by a "cycle of inquiry." Martha continually assesses students' actions and work to ascertain what they know and understand, what misconceptions they may have, what skills they have acquired, and what skills they need. The information gained from this inquiry is used to shape the curriculum and inform her instruction. The original curriculum plan is thus considered a draft. The curriculum evolves based on the teacher's exploration of students' needs, questions, and interests, her reflection and analysis, leading to adjustments to the original plan.

- Martha really needs to know the content of her study well to make beginning plans, design interesting activities for it, and respond to the children's emerging questions. However, she does not need to have all the answers. Once the study is in process, she becomes a co-investigator with the students. She functions as a facilitator whose goal is to get the students to learn how to acquire information, view it from a variety of perspectives, answer questions, and weigh evidence to make judgments and form their own opinions, and then generate still other questions.

- A sense of community is established in the classroom through opportunities for shared responsibilities, group work, working in pairs, and whole-class meetings in which ideas are shared. These create a feeling of trust, safety, and camaraderie, all of which make learning easier for the students.

- The knowledge students gain through the study is made public through presentations to each other, their families, and others in the school.

"Some thoughts I had watching Martha's classroom and how what she's doing parallels the work I do with adult learners: The whole process from going from an inquiry about a question evolved into other kinds of questions. Many different kinds of evidence were used, and many different forms of inquiry were used. There were individual inquiries and kids worked in groups on certain things. They also presented their work to each other. That's a very similar process to my class, with adult learners. The other thing I thought about is, one of the most powerful things for adult learners is to experience themselves as learners--so that they can have a sense of what that really means, that kind of genuine, light bulb going off, how that feels, remind themselves of how that feels, so that they can help facilitate that for children. What I saw going on through this whole process, what Martha got the kids to do, was get them into the understandings, the personages of others, to get them to understand the perspectives of others. It's by actually experiencing it themselves, that they will be able to translate that to later in life, to many other kinds of decisions they might make later in life, they will know that there's this whole process, that you can inquire about things, that you can gather evidence, and be able to make decisions, and that to understand that to make decisions, you're going to have to take in the perspectives of other people. . ." Falk