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Evaluation Strategies  
May 20, 2012  
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In order to determine the effectiveness of the inquiry-based curriculum in this sixth grade social studies course, and to measure student success and growth in the course, several evaluation methods will be utilized for the duration of the course and within the individual units. To best gather data relating to course effectiveness and student knowledge and understanding, a combination of formative and summative assessments will be used. Since this course is designed to foster independent and collaborative learning skills, formative assessments will provide the bulk of information about student progress in these areas. Summative assessments will take a variety of forms and will indicate the extent to which students can incorporate skills and knowledge gained through learning units.

Formative assessments will be conducted throughout the units, and in a variety of manners. To assess student progress in obtaining inquiry skills, such as evaluating sources, engaging in collaborative conversations, and conducting research to solve problems, the teacher will use checklists that indicate student progress in three categories: developing, proficient, and advanced, with specific qualities listed for each category. These categories will help the teacher make detailed observations about student behaviors while in group and individual settings. Data collected from these checklists will help the teacher drive instruction to meet the needs of her students, as well as to identify trends in student abilities. For instance, if a teacher notices that students are all ranking in the “developmental” level of a skill, she may determine to conduct a series of mini-lessons to improve student understanding and implementation of this skill. In other cases, she may use the data provided to develop heterogeneous groups of students or find peer mentors for struggling students.

As each unit progresses, a wide range of formative assessments will also be used to gauge student understanding of course content. To begin each unit, the teacher will have students take a pretest, allowing her to measure the extent to which students grasp concept knowledge prior to activities. This will allow her to make adjustments in inquiry-based experiences to adequately meet the needs of her student. A “Friday Quiz” system will also be implemented, in which students take a quick, five-minute quiz for the purpose of establishing their understanding of concepts, topics, and skills learned and utilized that week. Lastly, the teacher will use a “Four Corners” kinesthetic approach as needed throughout each unit to allow student reflection and encourage collaboration. In this type of formative assessment, students will go a to a corner with an assigned value that reflects their feelings on a concept, from “Totally Confused” to “Can Teach it to Friends”. By asking students to engage in self-evaluation, the teacher can gain a better understanding about student self-confidence regarding the unit, skills, or topics as another source of data about student progress. Based on this student-generated data, the teacher can adjust instruction accordingly.

When it comes to summative assessments, students will have a content-based unit test at the culmination of each unit, as well as in inquiry-based project in which they can investigate any area of interest. Each summative assessment will focus on different aspects of students learning. The unit test is a more “traditional” paper-and-pen test, in which students will answer multiple choice, short answer, and occasionally essay questions to reflect their learning of state-required content, as well as other content the teacher includes related to the assessment of unit goals. For the other half of the culminating assessment, students will conduct their own inquiry-based investigation into an area of their interest to demonstrate their proficiency with the skills they have acquired during the unit. In the first unit, “Geography”, a student may choose to investigate the reasons for varying landforms in a location they had previously explored. The student will use atlases, research, and knowledge from other content areas to conduct this investigation and develop a way to present his or her findings to the class and the teacher. Since this project is student-selected and requires students to investigate an area that interests them, students will engage in a more meaningful learning experience in a context that make sense to them. By combining the two culminating activities, the teacher can gain a true picture of what a student has learned over the course of the unit.