

Sample 2 – High School

The lesson included tasks that did not lead students to construct new and meaningful learning and that focus primarily on low cognitive demand or recall of information.

The learning tasks and prompts required minimal thinking by students, allowing most students to be passive or merely compliant and did not offer opportunities for S-S purposeful discourse as instruction was T-S-T only. Though the lesson was within a context of learning beyond school, success only required low level work/thinking. Though, it is highly effective to utilize a peer as a leader and to provide students opportunities to teach and present, the class members were only passively listening to the “teacher-led” 4-slide presentation on Careers in Natural Resources as it lasted 25+ minutes with no integrated engaging tasks. The students were listening without taking notes or following along on a device and there was no purpose established for their role as an audience member to increase engagement. She remained on one slide from 7:35-7:42. During the presentation the student teacher asked about 5-7 varying levels of questions for each slide. “Can anyone tell me the difference between these two people?” “Why would need someone in marketing?” “What is outdoor recreation?” “How do they get fish to float the top?” The teacher asked questions to engage students (coldcalling 2 who had been silent) at 7:38, 7:42 “What would a technician do?” 7:46 “How do they do population studies.”

One student participated by responding at least 5 times. However, 2 students didn’t speak until 17 minutes in. Because the leadership group was gone (the students who actively participate), the quieter students remained in the class, creating even more of a need to engage them in different ways. Though the questions from the student teacher were often for prediction or background knowledge (recall), students responded with one word/short phrases or no response at all. This also occurred after the teacher questions: T-“Does anybody know how they do that?” 0 responses T-“Technician: What do you think they would do? S-“They fix things? Nevermind.”

It is important to design learning tasks and activities to challenge student thinking that result in cognitive engagement by most students – requiring critical thinking beyond recall. Consider what students could have been asked to do with the information on the careers such as to weigh pros and cons, select ones of interest, etc. or how they could have constructed their own understanding using resources vs. a “teacher” delivering the content.

Knowing that the leadership was gone, how could you have designed this lesson to encourage discourse and higher levels of thinking/engagement? How can you support “student teachers” to create more engaging lessons? For example, the use of images is always valuable for visual learners. Students can be encouraged to use the pictures that are clearly visible and a prompt like, “What do you notice?” coupled with the prediction questions so they have a resource and way to make an educated guess. Students can also be given prompts to talk to each other first to generate ideas before sharing in front of the group. The more responsibility we can share with students, the more they can construct new understandings and think at higher levels. Was there a way for students to be led through an exploration on their own of careers and hear from experts or read selected texts?

Consider how you can begin the lesson with a rigorous learning expectation that is rooted in how students would be expected to use the information (3a). This will then set the students up to engage as active participants in a lesson that goes beyond just informational.