

Problematizing Practice

Choose any of the following student teacher scenarios below. Practice problematizing by discussing the following questions with a colleague:

- What appears to be the student teacher's motives?
- What appears to be the student teacher's biases?
- What appears to be the problem(s) or challenges of teaching?
- What are different biases and stereotypes reflected in the sources you listed above?
- How are the student teacher's actions useful and dangerous?

Problematizing Practice 1 – Elementary Scenario

This was the first day students participated in creating a game board. It was also the first day I used cooperative learning with my first graders. Students were sitting on the carpet from 9:12-9:28 a.m. to get instruction on how to create their own game board. Students were excited to get started. I assigned certain individuals with high writing ability to participate in specific activity (writing problem cards). However, I did not assign the other students in the group specific parts. This caused much confusion during the first 15 min. while I went to each group to assign specific parts. Here are my notes from each group:

Group 1: H, I, J, T

H and I were observed to be working well as a pair on problems for their game. J and T were very confused and unsure of what part to do on their game board.

Group 2: M, S, V

M was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. Students M and V were working together figuring out what they were going to do.

Group 3: A, C, G

G was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. Student A was observed to be playing with crayons, and student C was very confused and wanted help from teacher.

Group 4: L, U, W, Z

Z was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. L was working on the game board. Students U and W were very confused and off task. I had to continuously direct them towards creating characters for the game board. Instead of drawing characters they wrote numbers.

Group 5: B, E, N, Q

E was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. B, N, and Q were all confused about what they should be working on. I each gave them different jobs and they were observed to be working well after this.

Group 6: F, P, R, X

P was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. Students F and X were very social and started coloring game board. Student R was very confused about what she should be doing. F and X were not helping student R.

Group 7: D, K, O, Y

Y was observed to be independently working on the game board problems. Student O, and K were very confused about what they were supposed to do. I assigned them specific

parts of the game board to complete. Student D had to leave before we started the game board activity.

Overall, this was a crazy day! I didn't realize how hard it would be for children to work in student groups of 3 and 4. This does not work for my first grade class! What I did observe was that students were naturally gravitating toward one other person to work with. They obviously work much better in pairs. If I were to do this activity again, I would break the work up in half and give each pair a piece of the project. Then, when the pairs completed their work, I would put the group together to finish the project. I also realized that these first graders need more structure!!! I should have given each student a specific job, and this would have been an easier and more productive activity.

An interesting side note, I could see a clear separation of gender and language between the different groups. Girls worked with girls; boys worked with boys; and all the English Language Learners, even if they were in different groups, seemed to find one another. I was also surprised at how students did not help each other. I thought that the other students that knew what needed to be done would help the other students. Not only did they not help one another, some children were rude to others. In the midst of organizing the activity, I wasn't sure how to stop and deal with the rudeness – but I can't ignore this either. Do first graders not help one another? Is this a matter of child development? I think I assumed a lot during this lesson – I need to take time to figure all this out. My mentor teacher thinks it is better to leave children at table groups rather than mixing them up for a specific project. Would this be better?

I am also not sure how much children actually learned from this activity. I need to look at the actual game boards more.

Problematizing Practice 2 – Middle School

Transitions continue to be a struggle for me but I think I am making some progress. I am teaching in a six-grade reading block for 90 minutes and my supervisor and mentor teacher have pointed out to me that I lose a lot of instructional time during transitions between activities. On the advice of my mentor teacher, I had students today read their literature circle books quietly at the beginning of the period so I could take attendance and check-in with students who have been absent. For the most part, this worked well, however, I think it still took 5 – 7 minutes to get the students quiet and reading so I could proceed with the bookkeeping tasks.

My mentor teacher tells me I need to wait for students and make sure they are all listening, but honestly, if I wait for all students, we might not get anything else done during the period. But I've got to do something. Today was classic. I was attempting to give students instructions about their literature circles: the roles for each group, the questions, and the follow-up activity. I don't even manage to get the role piece done before I had 5 students (some waving their hand and talking and some just shouting out) that they had the wrong roles assigned to them or that they didn't want a role. I did regroup, returned to the schedule and set of directions I had printed out ahead of time, and this organization seemed to help.

Transitions are a problem but I am more concerned about the fact that students don't seem to be completing their comprehension packets. Only about 1/3 of the class has completed what is currently due. What does a teacher do to get students to finish work? I

am going to start requiring some of the students who are most behind to come in at lunch. The students really seem to like the book, so I don't think that is the problem. They are the most quiet and attentive when I am reading aloud and they don't like me to stop. They always know what happened last and they seem to anticipate the next chapter, so why don't they complete the packets?

Problematizing Practice 3 – High School Scenario

It wasn't all that great of day in English 1, period 2. I can't seem to get the timing down in this class and the students are just everywhere at once. I've had a horrible time getting students to bring their textbooks to class. (My mentor teacher has a hard time with this, too.) I used the document camera to post a large sign reminding students, "BRING YOUR BOOK TO CLASS," but it didn't do a lot of good. If students had their book, I gave them a small candy bar. This did encourage those without a book to run back to their locker and get it. I tried the same reward for participating in a later discussion. All this did was distract from the discussion and there were ongoing arguments about who should get the treat and who shouldn't.

One student was a complete disturbance. He was tossing his candy bar in the air for a while, and then he started eating it very loudly. He followed this with a loud burp, spit the bar into the garbage, and made a nasty remark to a fellow student along the way. My mentor teacher who was not in the room at the time told me I should have given him a referral. My problem is that I just don't know when to give the referrals and when not to give them. It seems like I could be giving them every three minutes.

Really, about the only thing that I accomplished during this shortened period (we were on assembly schedule) was to give students their homework assignment. 43 minutes

later they left and we didn't get through the discussion on civil rights for the day or to the required essay assignment. I just don't know if these students are interested in learning. Mostly, they are interested in their own social lives and I am not sure what I am supposed to do to change this.