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EDUC 359

Round Reflection

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Reflection on Grace Gallagher's Round

Grace teaches fifth grade writing at Nativity School of Worcester. For her round, she was introducing her students to a unit on persuasive writing, after having just completed a unit on writing an effective paragraph. The lesson started with a persuasive letter that Grace had written, arguing for the end of recess. After this very provocative letter, the students identified what Grace's arguments and evidence were, and then filled out graphic organizers to prepare them to write a letter of their own arguing in defense of recess.

The students in Grace's classroom are incredibly energetic and definitely not afraid to share their ideas with the rest of the class. As soon as Grace read her sample letter to the class, they were visibly emotional and ready to respond all at once. She channeled this energy into writing by having them respond in their journals with how her sample letter made them feel. I loved this activity, because it really encouraged the students to express themselves through their writing in a low-stakes way. In a way, it helped model part of the writing process, where students began to jot down their ideas and reactions, which they would later organize into a more polished final piece. The students legitimately believed that their recess was going to be taken away from them, and they were legitimately upset, which made this exercise authentic even though Grace had to tell them that she did not actually want their recess taken away to calm them down.

As the students began to analyze Grace's letter and identify her arguments and evidence, I did notice some students having trouble differentiating between the two. I walked around the room and visited many of the different groups of students, and though it seemed as if most were getting what was asked of them, quite a few of them were struggling at first and got a bit stuck on what made something an argument and what made something evidence. I did notice that some students in groups were helping each other to understand what was being asked of them and figure out what the correct answers were. Eventually, the class went over everything together, which helped everyone to catch up. Grace did a good job of managing the class, getting them to transition effectively from working in groups to going over everything together as a class. She also made an effort to hear from every student in the class, as most of the boys really wanted to speak and answer every question that they could.

When they transitioned into the second activity, which involved filling out a graphic organizer so that they could write their own persuasive letter arguing in defense of recess, I did notice quite a few students getting confused about what they could write down for their arguments and evidence. Many of the students were writing arguments and evidence that were direct counter-arguments to what Grace had written in their letter, rather than coming up with their own reasons why recess should stay. Many students had some good original reasons, but many were focusing on writing reasons that were the opposite of the reasons that Grace had provided. The students were ideally supposed to come up with their own arguments, but they believed that they needed to respond directly to Grace's arguments. I am wondering if perhaps they needed more explicit instructions in making their own original arguments.

Overall, this was a great class to observe. The fifth graders have so much energy, and it was really fun seeing them get excited about writing and learn how they could use a new writing skill to express themselves. It was also helpful for me to observe another middle school classroom to see how other middle school teachers use techniques to manage transitions. Though my eighth grade students are more mature than fifth grade students, they still struggle with transitions, and that is something I am always looking to improve upon.