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Teaching & Learning II

December 3, 2015

El Round (¡...en Español!)

The nerves kicked in before attending James' round for a Spanish 5 class at South High Community High School. After all, he had said in his invitation email to brush up on our Spanish. My Spanish has always been terrible, ever since my first classes in sixth grade. Even so, I wanted to attend a humanities round *not* in English to see some of the ways in which world language teachers can engage their students.

I found myself in a quiet basement room talking over the round inquiry questions with James before his class. He was working with a lesson on NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and its relevance to Mexican history. I know that I was particularly interested in his lesson from the standpoint of his efforts to include grammar review. An emphasis on grammar in context, and less of a push for stand-alone grammar exercises, was a connection I saw between my round a few weeks ago and James' today. Grammar is often tough to teach in context, so to be able to see another implementation strategy was enlightening. James began class with the bell-ringer, asking students to make a comparative or superlative phrase based on what they had been learning about NAFTA. After, he led into a concept circle of key vocabulary from the unit, a strategy that he and I learned about together in Jie Park's "Teaching ELLs" course. I think he used this strategy appropriately and effectively, since the students could really benefit from building their own sentences with some scaffolding. The circle provided a natural scaffold, and all but one student, Scott, was able to verbally express their sentences. The

expressions allowed James to see what students retained, while also helping him meet his language goals.

One choice that James made that I really liked was writing his content and language goals on the board. He mentioned them at the beginning of class, and then at the end of the period he returned to them to ask students if they felt that they had met these goals. I wonder how this would look in my class. For one, writing them down would make me think more carefully about my goals. On the other hand, I worry about time. James only needed a couple minutes total to review these goals, but I often run out of time at the end of my period. I wonder if this has something to do with the number of students in the classes, since I have more students than James. Still, I'd like to give it a try, perhaps with my next unit in January where I can really take the time to focus on this written explanation of goals.

Almost everything on James' agenda was accomplished, though the ending debrief time was cut a bit short. He had budgeted 15 minutes for the Amazing Race activity, though this ended up taking over 20 minutes. I think having the four stages was valuable; the students had to apply interdisciplinary knowledge to find these answers. In this way, the lesson worked out well. I think that having a longer chunk of time allowed for students to feel rushed only by other groups, not by the clock. Certainly, the conversation at the end felt truncated, though this is easily something that can be picked up in the next class.

¡Ya Basta!