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Title: Deepening what it means to read (and write) like a historian: Progressions of instruction across a school year in an eleventh grade U.S. history class

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Strand of work: Design of and Design-Based Research on Intervention

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze the deepening of instruction in a high school history class. The classroom teacher designed instruction to meet six literacy goals. As the year progressed, she asked students to engage in increasingly complex tasks to meet these goals based upon assessments of her students' learning.

Research Context or Methodology

Settings and Participants: The setting for this research was an eleventh grade U.S. history class for non-selective honors students. Students lived in a near suburb of a large metropolitan city in a working class community with a large Latino/a population. Non-selectivity means students or their parents could request placement in the honors class regardless of their achievement levels, so there were large variations in achievement.

The history teacher in the study was a veteran teacher with 12 years of experience and was a member of the history design team of Project READI. She had worked with the Project READI team from the beginning of the project and had participated in designing and teaching two units of history with the team in a previous year.

Research Design, Data Collection, and Analysis: This qualitative research study used a descriptive case study design to analyze the teacher's instructional moves throughout an entire year of instruction. Data consisted of the teacher's lesson plans, written and audio-taped reflections, and a template in which she described her instruction in relation to the units she taught and the six literacy goals of instruction previously created by the design team to guide instruction. Researchers analyzed instruction in each of the six goals for patterns of interaction with other goals and progressions across units of instruction. They also looked for patterns in decision making that led to changes in instruction. The researchers then asked others in the team, including the teacher, to verify the patterns identified.

General Statement of Preliminary Findings

The teacher began the year with a unit designed to introduce each of the six goals. As she saw that students were ready, she added more complex iterations of instruction for each of the goals. For example, when students had provided evidence that they could identify categories of society historians discussed in text (e.g. political and social), she

expanded the number of categories (e.g. to economic, technological, religious). Subsequently, she had them think about subcategories. After that, she had students develop their own categories for analysis as they wrote historical arguments. With each of the six goals, students were asked to engage in increasingly more complex tasks, and each of these iterations in instruction represented a piece of an effort to coordinate instruction across the six goals. The teacher made instructional decisions based upon her high level of knowledge about history and the literate practices of historians, her careful documentation of instructional plans and the uptake of instruction by students, her focus on the six literacy goals, and on her ability to adapt instruction based upon her assessment of student progress.

Implications

Although the literate practices of historians is currently a popular focus of history instruction in high school, the current curriculum examples available for teachers consist of drop in instruction that fails to become more complex as students gain expertise. This paper explicates the ways in which instruction can progress across a school year, so that students end the year at a higher level of sophistication as readers of history than after their first introduction to historical reading and writing practices. Thus, the paper has implications for both curriculum design and student learning.

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