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Perspective Taking through an Elementary Unit on Lewis and Clark

As summer turned to fall, fourth grade students at All Texas School learned about the Lewis and Clark Expedition through an integrated thematic unit that combined knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Not only did these students produce a wide variety of projects based on their Lewis and Clark readings, but their literary examples demonstrated proficiency in writing because of their working with primary and secondary data as well as historical accounts, artifacts, and maps. Brooke (personal correspondence, November 15, 2010) illustrated this with her writing when she said, "The reason we are going on an expedition is to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean and report about soil, vegetation, fossils, minerals, climate, mammals, insects, birds, and reptiles." With their teacher's guidance and help, students began to understand the scope of exploration, of gathering information, engaged in inductive speculation and deductive recommendations, and other survival skills required in wild America. Each child created multiple writing samples that engaged students while organizing the perspectives of stories told through the eyes of the characters who lived at that time and traveled alongside Lewis and Clark.

While studying an interdisciplinary unit on the topic of rivers, these students learned about the day-to-day experiences of the Corps of Discovery, Native Americans, maps, people, journals, and events. Students who worked with this content committed about forty minutes each day for six weeks of the study. These students focused their attention on the literature recorded by the Corps of Discovery, created written responses to the texts, and offered justified opinions of their own. Because students committed to the entire academic enterprise, they worked together through large group, small group, and individualized instruction.

These student experiences helped to answer the question: How can an educator teach perspective taking using literature? The action research described explained how one teacher used language instruction to teach content and concepts in one unit of study. In elementary school classrooms most of the time was allocated in the literacy block. To work perspective taking content into the literacy block was a way for students to get access to multiple perspectives. The classroom procedures the students followed detailed their experiences in exploring the skill of perspective taking.

Children's Literature

Students looked at the events they read about from multiple perspectives. Integrating geography with children's literature provided students with an opportunity for perspective taking. The National Council for the Social Studies (2010, 1994) described four types of perspective taking including forming personal, academic, pluralistic, and global perspectives. Students needed to look at non-western traditions as part of their global perspectives including indigenous and enslaved people. Students also needed to know what was happening in the world at this same time. In using these global perspectives students used children's literature to help them have vicarious experiences with other people. Furthermore, students used an inquiry arc to raise questions about perspective taking, connect their investigation into a geographic disciplinary framework, examined their sources, and shared their information (NCSS, 2013). Students formed personal perspectives that reflected upon how they viewed the events in the book. Through all the multiple perspectives used to approach the work, they developed a deeper appreciation of the events they studied.

When students became old enough to read for themselves, they made choices on what they read for pleasure and what resources they selected to compare perspectives. Many researchers found students to be successful in using stories to reach social studies objectives such as multiple perspectives (Brugar, 2016: Bickford & Rich, 2015). Teachers selected children's literature for the unit by providing representative samples that encouraged students to form the personal, academic, pluralistic, or global perspectives. Several good guides to selection of children's literature in social studies exist (Bainbridge, Pantaleo, & Ellis, 1999; Oden, 1995). The samples helped the students to form one perspective or one book encouraged the student to develop all four perspectives.

Students found biographies fascinating, and they were hungry for more books about the lives of interesting people. Students used biography and nonfiction to take perspectives, because they brought non-western perspectives to the students. They used the opportunity of reading biographies and non-fiction to build rich content backgrounds from trade books. They needed to look for connections between themselves and other people as they explored social studies to help them understand what life was like for people in contrasting times and places (Foster & Yeager, 1998; Yeager, Foster, Maley, Anderson, & Morris, 1998). Fiction encouraged perspective taking, if quality biography and non-fiction were not available.

Students wrote to produce products that demonstrated different perspectives, thus students created new forms of writing. In most instances application of information to varied writing forms helped students form perspectives. Many authorities gave specific instruction on improving elementary writing skills in social studies classrooms (Brindle, Graham, Harris, & Hebert; 2016; Brugar, & Roberts, 2014; Hughes, 2013). Students created documents that described all four perspectives, and as they accomplished that, they created letters, journal entries, and analysis. Students revised their writing by critically examining their writing, by receiving input from teachers, by examining different perspectives, and through peer review. Students learned to refine their elementary social studies writing by working with partners or cooperative groups to review their work (Lehraus, 2015; Montgomery, Christie, & Staudt, 2014). Students improved their writing by reading and analyzing their own and the writing of others. Teachers also played an active role in giving feedback on student writing so that students made changes prior to creating a product. In demonstrating and analyzing new forms of writing teachers helped individuals and small groups revise their works.

Why Should Students Read the Records of Lewis and Clark?

Using the Lewis and Clark literature was a terrific way for student to identify and share geographic characteristics of various places Lewis and Clark discovered during their explorations. The saga of Lewis and Clark related to the National Geographic Standards: Places and Regions: How culture and experience influenced people's perception of places and regions (NCGE, 2012). As children searched through the vast amount of information documented by the Corps of Discovery, their shared knowledge base increased daily. Students not only gathered facts, impressions, drawings, and maps, but they reported their findings with written reports, thus debriefed everyone in the class. Students explored together in a cyclical process of reading, debriefing, writing, and debriefing that enabled children to explore affective learning dimensions.

When students began this thematic unit, fourth graders collectively read *The Incredible Journey of Lewis and Clark* as part of the river unit and generalized about the geographic terminology and perspectives needed to navigate successfully unexplored landscapes (Blumberg, 1987). By doing so, they encountered educational ideas that included understanding the influences of the climate on the environment and its life forms, negotiating hazards, identifying physical geographic features, recording edible plants and animals from place to place, noting changes in cultural characteristics that identify human beings from one provincial area to those of another, identifying problems and making collective decisions, or meeting the physical, social, and survival needs of the entire party. As students traveled the footsteps of the Corps of Discovery, they noted how goods and ideas traveled from place to place as well as identified how the members of the Corps communicated with others.

When classmates selected and individually read thematically linked books related to a topic such as "Exploring America with Lewis and Clark", they found themselves in a cooperative learning jigsaw method of instruction (Nurhaniyah, Soetjipto, & Hanurawan, 2015). Thus, everyone found himself or herself to be an expert of his/her own topic, yet contributors to the group cause. The variety of geography ideas presented in individual student writing became only one part of their classroom experience. Other educational opportunities developed as they collectively read, edited, and discussed their work. Because of their interest in the subject of the Corps of Discovery, students noticed the independent reading perspectives of other students about Thomas Jefferson, the life cycle of salmon, and the Shoshoni Indians. If the Corps did not go west as conquerors, did students notice the diplomatic line that these explorers were taking? Did the Native Americans who celebrated the arrival of Lewis and Clark still appreciate the explorers as much as they did when they first made contact? Students examined this element of controversy to understand that the voyage of discovery was not a dead issue and that it had supporters and detractors.

What Do Students Read about Lewis and Clark?

Students developed different skills for the different subjects in one unit. When students became interested in learning more information about Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery, they picked independent reading books. Notable selections included topics about adventure, interesting characters, the call of wilderness, the magnificence of the land, and many others. To a child, the prospects of crossing mountains, canoeing white water rapids, running into uncharted territory, confronting wild animals, and addressing new peoples, were enough to motivate the exploration of entire libraries and summer vacations. As Lewis and Clark journeyed through the watersheds of the Father of Waters, across the Great Plains, over the Rocky Mountains, down the Columbia River, and to the Pacific Ocean, students noted their own vicarious experiences of the imagination, discovery, and adventure.

When students wanted to investigate an independent research project they started by looking for a specific project idea to share with the class. Next students used reference books to find photos of the site today and to find where they could travel. They checked other books for details about the area, people, expeditions, or death of Lewis.

What Do Students Do with this Information?

Most interestingly, students interpreted and summarized their Corps of Discovery adventure by creating a giant class mural. While reading *The Incredible Journey of Lewis and Clark*, they created a map-related mural collage that joined photos, charts, drawings, and other related materials for a bulletin board extravaganza that illustrated animal and plant discoveries, Indians encountered, and various events and landmarks along the route (Blumberg, 1987). Students created special symbols to designate recorded moments and adventures while using map keys to define the trip. Individual students wrote captions that explained the significance of different events, paths, and geographic obstacles. From their readings and discussions, students also created a time-line that featured major events that included links to their mural topics that displayed a variety of images, drawings, and other forms of artwork. They saw their nation expanding through this academic enterprise; in one brief time they realized how much of the country opened because of this expedition. They tailored their individual reading to learn more about the places where they traveled during their vacations.

Writing

Like any member of an expedition, students kept a journal as if they were members of the Corps of Discovery by telling their own unique accounts of the geography experience. In this exercise, each child noted the difficulties of perspective writing, its reliability and validity, and gleaning facts from interpretation or speculation. Nick (personal correspondence, November 15, 2010) explained through his written work, "We had one accident. Cruyatte shot Lewis in the rear. He thought that there was an elk and he shot it." The fourthgrade students determined the most important part of the trip and used geographic landmarks to tell their story. These points of navigation helped the Lewis and Clark expedition know where they were as they moved across the land. Students also described Native American relations and events between the two groups.

In an exercise on perspective-taking, students wrote letters home to relatives to keep them informed about their progress, privations, and reactions. Together, students worked with the same historical background, but the stories they created allowed them to imagine differing perspectives. Todd (personal correspondence, November 15, 2010) explained in his writing, "Lewis made something called portable soup and it tasted so bad that we killed one of the horses and ate that when we had no food and no animals to kill to eat and all we had left was portable soup." Students used their imaginations again to create a different time and place in their written expressions. They confronted this imagined view with experiences that allowed students to probe and discover their misconceptions. While the writing skills exercised during the perspective-taking letter were like those exhibited by students in their journals, it allowed each child to practice writing in a more familiar form.

Analysis

Students compared two secondary sources of information that they had read, but each individual child also compared primary sources using Venn diagrams. Students analyzed a book and the author's point of view by breaking it down into similar and dissimilar parts. Using the books of Scott O'Dell's (1986) Streams to the River, River to the Sea and Rhonda Blumberg's (1987) The Incredible Journey of Lewis and Clark, students constructed a Venn diagram to compare data. When students exposed their misconceptions and beliefs about data representation, they noted their own related impressions, interpretations, and assumptions. Within this brainstorming inquiry approach, students confronted validity and reliability questions and other questions that ameliorated their initial perceptions about the Corps of Discovery (Brugar, Halvorsen, & Hernandez, 2014: Croddy & Levine, 2014; Whitlock & Brugar, 2017). This pattern of debriefing, lesson in inductive, and deductive thinking helped students develop insights into their own abilities to assess and evaluate data (Bilica & Flores, 2009; Chien, 2011; Gasparini, 2004).

Students developed their analytical skills with the guidance and help of their teachers while later. They worked with evaluative criteria that they determined by themselves. Jonathan (personal correspondence, November 15, 2010), wrote when he compared authors who wrote about Lewis and Clark, "They talk about Sacagawea more than Lewis and Clark." Using other books related to this topic, students focused their attention on analytically comparing and evaluating the leadership styles, contributions, and backgrounds of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Considering these qualities of the human character, they designed an insignia that symbolized the Corps of Discovery.

As a classroom resource booklet, students made directories containing native tribes, plants, animals, and other information categorized on the trip. Students engaged in the classification, grouping, sorting, and ordering of these logical taxonomies and then later compared these schemes with those that Lewis and Clark organized from their experiences east of the Mississippi River. Students next took on a project that required them to use their analytical skills with the most common attributes of each animal and plant. They then reconfigured this information into a synthesis of a new taxonomy, which was entirely their own. They evaluated new relationships between data described and defined through pictures, words, and information. By diagramming connections between groups of data, students created a resource book that helped them remember what they had learned and what they had questioned.

Connections to the Present

During this study, a local archeologist and site director helped the students locate and contact an ethnographer to acquaint students with Native American tribal customs and dress. Additionally, students from a nearby university contributed to this learning experience by demonstrating authentic methods for cooking, beading, tanning, and making tools and weapons. As these elementary students asked probing questions about their own understanding of the differences and similarities between modern Native Americans and their antecedents, each child also took careful notes to reconstruct their stories after their visitors departed. By editing and rewriting multiple drafts, students were able to incorporate this ethnographer's statements and stories with the answers to their questions with the commentary that other students asked.

The greatest contribution that the Lewis and Clark academic experience made was the opportunity for students to understand the metacognitive skill of reflecting, thinking about the thinking process, thinking about how others think, research, and write. Throughout this entire unit, students periodically created documents that clearly revealed their ability to critically think, dispel myths, discern misconceptions, and understand legends. Students responded to their weekly writing assignments with notes such as:

- Lewis had to plan supplies for a journey that he knew very little about. What would you take if the President asked you to lead an expedition into an unknown territory? What kind of preparations would be necessary?
- Compare modern maps of the route with those made by Lewis and Clark. How were they alike and different?

Students compared the past to the present, made decisions, and prioritized them into the building of an understanding, a depth of knowledge, and an imagination inspired by the realities experienced by the Corps of Discovery. Essays required students to make decisions about the positions they took and to justify the evidence cited to persuade others. Patrick (personal communication, November 15, 2010) said, "Some Indians thought dog meat was a delicacy." The teacher collected all the writing assignments in individual portfolios to evaluate students' understanding of the text. Students also determined their best work and selected just a few examples to maintain as part of their record. Before moving on with the next geography adventure in learning, discovery, and exploration, students looked at their accumulated body of work to determine their individual progress.

Conclusions

Teachers engaged students with literature while producing products that demonstrated what students learned. The teachers showed the perspectives students acquired through reading and comparing narratives. Teachers helped students work toward the common good in a democracy by helping the student to examine perspectives. Teachers focused on the content, skills, and values of the expedition of Lewis and Clark. Teachers who used multiple methods of teaching and learning including knowledge, skills, and values with multiple perspectives of instruction, found that learning multiple perspectives with literature selection was a force in the curriculum. Students used reading and writing to form their products about Lewis and Clark that documented their learning. In their reading and writing, they developed rich background and content about the experience. The products helped students learn perspective while working with content that was as adventurous and exciting as a western novel. Students explored and formed perspectives through reading children's literature. When students studied these explorers, the students developed an empathetic understanding for the hardships and sacrifices made by the Corps of Discover as they traveled on this expedition.

Learning about Lewis and Clark was important because students practiced forming perspectives. Through children's literature Lewis and Clark become models for qualities such as courage, service, perseverance, and loyalty. Student interest and motivation flowed into this project because they felt the problems as their own; they, therefore, were interested when they understood what it meant and found it relevant today as they formed a personal perspective. The fourthgrade students dealt with events; these events drew them into a story of history and geography by looking at ideas like manifest destiny with academic perspective. As in any novel approach to the integrated, thematic unit of geography, there were multiple opportunities for a teacher and children to learn, think, and work together toward the goals and objectives of unity, harmony, and cooperation. In this way, the figures in the unit planted the seeds for meaningful learning by providing a foundation that allowed the students to see the process of forming perspectives.

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Appendix 1

22, 1803

Dear Journal,

Today I found out that I am going to be on an expedition. The co-captains are Lewis and Clark. Lewis and Clark were in the war with me. The reason we are going on an expedition is to find a water route to the Pacific Ocean and report about soil, vegetation, fossils, minerals, climate, mammals, insects, birds, and reptiles.

Another reason is to tell Indians of "our wish to be neighborly to them." I cannot wait to start on my trip. We will leave on May 21, 1804. The rules for the expedition are (1) when fatigued lie down for two whole hours (2) wash your feet in cold water every morning, (3) when your feet are chilled wash them with a little liquor, (4) during difficult marches eat very little to avoid becoming overtired. (Brooke, personal correspondence, November 15, 2010)

Appendix 2

May 2, 1806 Dear Journal,

We were all in a hurry to get back home. The Indians we met on our way back were not very friendly. In April, we met the Walla Wallas. They wanted us to stay and helped us stock up on supplies. The word spread that we were coming back. The captains gave their speech about trading with the U.S. and intertribal peace. We spent almost a month near the Clearwater River. This is where the Nez Perce Indians live. We made many friends. There was not much food at our camp and Clark set up a medical office so we could trade for food. The Indians would trade medicine for dogs. Dog meat is very good. Soon Chief Twisted Hair returned our horses so we could cross the Rocky Mountains. We tried to leave on June 15th but the snow was too deep. On June 24th we left again with a guide and reached Traveler's Rest in six days. Our captains decided to split up and see new territory. Lewis was to follow the Marias River and Clark was to follow [the] Yellow Stone River. They would meet at the Missouri River. Clark's group did not have good luck. His horses were stolen while he was asleep. Lewis' group was fine for a while. Lewis did not want to sell to any Blackfeet. We soon met up with some Indians. We tried to tell them about trading with us. During the night some of our guns were taken. Reuben Field stabbed an Indian in the heart and Lewis killed a Blackfeet Indian. This is the only time that we had to kill someone on our expedition. The Indians left in a hurry with their horses and weapons. We left quickly with their supplies. We finally got to the Missouri River. Yeah! We had one accident. Cruyatte shot Lewis in the rear. He thought that there was an elk and he shot it. On August 14, 1806, we finally saw our friends the Mandans and Hidatsas. (Nick, personal correspondence, November 15, 2010)

Appendix 3

December 25, 1804

Dear Mom,

It's Christmas and we are having the best time. We're firing rifles and eating and drinking. We're listening to music and having the time of our lives. We have been doing this all day and it's about eight o'clock. Lewis says that we should go to bed at nine. I am having the time of my life. Your son,

Todd (personal correspondence, November 15, 2010).

P.S. Lewis made something called portable soup and it tasted so bad that we killed one of the horses and ate that when we had no food and no animals to kill to eat and all we had left was portable soup. That makes me want some of your delicious soup.

Appendix 4

Different -- O'Dell (1986)

They talk about Sacagawea more than Lewis and Clark. They mentioned when Sacagawea saw her mother's scalp on one of the Minnatres. They don't have facts after the story. He named Sacagawea's baby different than the other book. They said who Running Deer was.

Same.

Talk about Lewis and Clark. Talk about Sacagewea. They didn't say how Sacagewea's mother got scalped. They both have maps in the book. They mentioned when the baby was born and what Sacagawea's baby was named.

Different -- Blumberg (1987)

They talk more about Lewis and Clark than Sacagawea. He didn't mention when Sacagawea saw her mother's scalp on one of the Minnatres. They have more facts after the story. He named Sacagawea's baby different than the other book. They didn't say who Running Deer was (Jonathan, personal correspondence, November 15, 2010).

Appendix 5

The Legacy of Lewis and Clark

Lewis and Clark left a lot for our country and us. They found a new kind of deer, a magpie, prairie dogs, and a horney toad. They found new plants for us to stay away from and for medicine. They named rivers. If it weren't for them, we would probably be living in another state. They went where hardly anyone dared to go. They encountered different tribes, friendly and hostile. The Nez Perce, Arikaras, Yankton Sioux, Mandans, Hidatsas, Shoshonis, and the believed lost Welch tribe were all friendly tribes. The Blackfeet and Teton Sioux were both hostile. They gave most tribes peace medals. They brought us new medicines. Two rattlesnake rings crushed up and [a] glass of water would help birth. They brought us food . . . some Indians thought dog meat was a delicacy (Patrick, personal communication, November 15, 2010).

Appendix 6: Resources for Teachers

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