

■ *Childhood/Early Childhood Education Department*

Observation of Teaching of Dr. Lin Lin, Assistant Professor

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Dr. Lin Lin was in the classroom a few minutes before starting time. She showed the first slide of a Power Point file on the screen to prompt students about the upcoming lesson. The PowerPoint was projected at different times throughout the lesson to highlight different issues to be discussed. Lin Lin returned graded homework and answered questions the students had. Then, she started the lesson right on time.

The students sat in their cooperative groups to work on the different tasks. The class environment was relaxed throughout the lesson. The students seemed very comfortable asking and answering questions, and contributing their ideas to the classroom conversation. It was clear that they were used to this participative style of lesson.

The goals of this first lesson of a mini-unit on citizenship were to lead students to understand various meanings of “citizenship” based on Westheimer and Kahne’s perspective. Lin Lin could have just given these authors’ classification of type of citizens—Personal Responsible, Participatory, and Justice-Oriented. Instead, she developed and implemented a high quality lesson, using a variety of pedagogical strategies that helped students moved from their previous knowledge and views of citizenship towards a more sophisticated characterization.

The pedagogy modeled by Lin Lin in this lesson was constructivist in nature—student centered with active participation of students, focusing on promoting students’ connections with previous knowledge. Through Lin Lin’s approach, the students were able to *learn the content* of the social studies curriculum while *learning teaching strategies* to be used in their own future classrooms.

The sequence of tasks allowed students to move from their somehow naïve views of citizenship, to learning about a particular “known citizen”, to the use higher level skills to abstract and understand various levels of citizenship. While the students worked on the tasks, Lin Lin walked around the room, listening to students’ conversations, answering questions, and probing understanding.

The tasks completed by the students were the following:

- a. Students brainstormed in small groups and wrote words about “What does it mean to be a citizen?”
- b. Then, the groups contributed their ideas while the instructor wrote on the board, organizing the responses for the follow up discussion.
- c. Students worked in their small groups on a task that targeted different learning styles:
 - Read a brief paper assigned by Lin Lin with information about one well known citizen—Cesar Chavez, Rudy Bridges, Judy Heuman, or Lois Marie Gibbs.
 - Summarize the main information to be later read to the rest of the class.
 - Prepare a *Human Statue* to transmit the information about their citizen. That is, the students would be on a still position (human statue) to create a scene that would somehow represent their citizen.
 - One person in the group would read the summary about the citizen; another student would show where in the country (map on the board) the citizen had developed his/her work.
 - Ask the rest of the class if they had questions and provide answers.Each person in the group had a different role during this brief presentation.
- d. Presentation
- e. Class congress-closing

After all groups were done with their presentations, there was a class discussion analyzing commonalities of the citizens depicted in the human statue and the readings. The citizens were chosen by Lin Lin so these commonalities would highlight that these individuals fought for others, for minority groups or workers, such as African Americans, poor farmers, and people with disabilities. The citizens were meaningfully chosen so important topics such as racism, civil rights, and the protection of the environment would be included in the discussion.

Through the conversation, the students broaden their original views about a citizen—as a person who has particular rights and does some ‘good things’ for the community—toward a citizen who goes beyond his/her immediate community to take action that would improve the life of others.

During the following lesson—which I did not observe—Lin Lin showed six short segments of “When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts” a documentary by Spike Lee about the devastation of New Orleans due to Hurricane Katrina in Summer 2005. After the showing, Lin Lin led a discussion about personal, group, and government responsibilities and responses to the catastrophe, which built on and extended the concept of citizenship.

I believe Lin Lin is an excellent teacher, whose lively style sparks students’ interest and participation. They learn not only content but pedagogy while developing critical thinking about society and ethic values.

Sincerely,



Susana Davidenko