

Myrna Ordon

Case 8 Synthesis for Frank Baumann

Thanks to my previous experience in a TESL program and teaching abroad, the task of unit planning was not completely foreign to me. I had planned a scope and sequence before, and I had planned themed English camps that basically required weekly unit plans. What was new to me was the idea of inquiry integration in the planning process. I recall being very overwhelmed with this idea at the start of the planning process; the need to answer all those questions given in Case 8. But what I realized is that my partner and I were answering those questions as we were planning the unit.

The unit planning process started with a look at the concept of 'biodiversity.' This was a theme that was inspired by my partner's grant approval for a field trip to the Beaty Biodiversity Museum. Our school advisors had agreed on this theme earlier with us and we were excited to pursue it. However, on that first day of Case 8 we had realized how broad the topic of biodiversity was and it had to be narrowed down. After looking at resources online, we discovered that continuing animal studies would be exciting for our primary grades. Our students will have just finished learning about salmon, so we thought it would be interesting to study a kind of animal visibly different – insects. Moreover, we could compare, contrast and connect salmon to insects. The various creative online resources made us enthusiastic and ready to plan for our unit. Our motivator was the fact that there were so many questions we as teacher candidates had about insects; insects would be the perfect opportunity for inquiry.

It is easy to get carried away with looking online at all the fun activities you can do with your classroom, especially with insects. But I knew the most important part of the unit was the very first day you would introduce it. So our task was how do we introduce our theme in an exciting, meaningful yet simplistic way? After reflecting on the kind of students in my class, and considering the students in my partner's class, I knew that simple was imperative. *What vocabulary would they know? Do they know the word insect? Do they know what an insect is? What about the word mammal?* We had to be prepared for possible questions our students would have and the prior knowledge they may or may not have.

The overall layout of our unit had to be determined based on both of our "teaching styles." All of the unit plan templates given to us were useful in figuring out what we were both comfortable with. It turns out that we both like simplistic and linear styles of formatting. I found that some sections were better suited for the unit plan, and others for the lesson plan. With differentiated learning for example, I felt that it would be best addressed in a lesson plan so that you can really think about how to adapt the specific activities for your students. First Nations integration on the other hand should

be considered in the unit as a whole, but may not have a significant role in each lesson plan. This process required a lot of prioritizing and organizing.

For the introductory activity itself, our goal was to have an activity that not only captured our students' attention, but the Big Ideas of the new curriculum and our rationale – for students to recognize *observable features*. I thought back to previous activities done in our practicum classes and remembered the physical organizer with hula hoops. This was done to introduce living and nonliving things and our students were fully engaged through the whole process. We would modify the activity so that the students had to organize coloured images of assorted animals into three different categories. Our goal was to not reveal the animal names until the very end; the objective was to look at the animals and sort based on their physical appearance. Of course, a lot of logistics had to be planned out in order for this activity to work effectively and to steer away any possible confusion on sorting the animals. This required some background research for myself and my partner on what animals were mammals, insects and fish. Even looking through possible activities to do with insects, I realized that I really did not know anything about animals! So this was a learning process for myself. Planning this activity really put into perspective how important teacher's background knowledge on the subject is, and to anticipate any possible "curveballs" the students might throw at you. We chose our animals carefully (animals with four legs, for example) and deliberately made the insect category have the highest number. We thought a class "count together" would be good for a small math integration.

When it was time to deliver our activity to our peers, I felt nervous being the first group to go. However, having them sit at "carpet" made me feel more comfortable and I was excited to reveal to them what the hula hoops were for. My partner and I had prepared for possible comments or "misplacement" of animals by our peers acting as students. But what I learned from this experience, and from others in my practicum, is that you really can't predict what will come out of your students' mouths. To me, this is what makes teaching exhilarating and humorous. As we finished the activity, I realized that our peers were looking carefully at the pictures and were engaged in a multimodal way of organizing. I was particularly disappointed we didn't get to share with our friends our unit plan presentation and that we went over our time period (maybe because we were the first group), but hoped that they have had a look afterwards. In the end, I do believe that we did achieve our lesson objectives in that we wanted our students to be engaged and to observe. Moreover, we wanted to share with our peers another way of doing graphic organizers. A great way to finish off Case 8!