

INCREASING 4TH GRADE STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER STRATEGIES

by

Brennan Dickinsen

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 2020

Capstone Project Facilitator: Trish Harvey

Content Expert: Courtney Loynachan

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

In my young professional career as an elementary school teacher, I have experienced many different student needs. This can be academically and or socially in the classroom on a day to day level. During my six years in fourth and fifth grade, I have had the opportunity to see this happening to students first hand and doing my best to help support these students any way I can. When students struggle academically and or socially it really makes it hard for them to focus on the task at hand. This is where I decided to try and mix things up in the classroom to help students be more engaged during lessons. From time to time it did increase their focus and engagement, but I wanted to do more and be more organized with it. This project is intended on answering my research questions, how do technology and other strategies increase student engagement?

Project Overview

As any teacher knows, finding the best way to engage students in your classroom is not always easy. Each student has their own needs and learns things sometimes at a different pace than their peers. This can look very different from classroom to classroom. In order to help give teachers some options for their students, I created a two week language arts lesson, with ten lesson plans incorporated with it. The lessons can be elongated or shortened to match the amount of time a teacher has to adopt the lesson. Each lesson focuses on one or two on the student engagement options that tie into language arts, specifically making inferences.

Participants and Setting

My project is for fourth grade students in a language arts setting that can tie into any or most curriculums. The engagement strategies and options given can be easily adjusted for any grades from upper-elementary and higher. The lessons given are focused on a 45 minute language arts curriculum that can be broken apart if necessary. In some cases, the instruction can be given in 15 minutes and the rest is for student work time. Other times the lesson needs to be separated into 20 and 25 minute increments to accommodate the classes or specials for that day.

Project Format

In this project, the curriculum is designed by using the Understanding by Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Stage 1 will share my essential questions as well as the goals for the few weeks that the lessons are created for. Stage 2 will be an explanation and examples of the assessments that will be used for the two weeks of lessons. This will include some summative and formative assessments as well as some pre and post surveys. The majority of my assessments will be formative with teacher observations and note taking as well as class participation to see what works well and what can be improved for the next lesson. Finally in Stage 3 is where the lessons are shared. I used a two week, 10 lessons format that was focused on an upper elementary language arts lesson, specifically with making inferences. The lessons share student objectives, the engagement strategy, the format of the lesson as well as prior and next connections to the lesson before and after. The lessons have flexibility to fit in many different elementary level classrooms as well. Supplies needed should be available in most if not all learning environments.

STAGE 1 - DESIRED RESULTS

Unit Title: Student Engagement Strategies for Elementary Students

Established Goals (standards):

Learners will be able to work cooperatively and productively in a group to accomplish a set goal.

Learners will be able to utilize appropriate student engagement strategies to help achieve the highest success possible.

Understandings: *Students will understand that....*

- Each student has their own needs when it comes to learning.
- They are part of a group of learners
- They know what makes up an inference
- They know how to make their own inferences from multiple sources

Essential Questions:

- How can I make an inference?
- How can I achieve my goals?
- What engagement strategy works best for me?

Knowledge

Students will know:

- Several engagement strategies
- What and inference is

Skills

Students will be able to:

- Create and solve inferences
- Utilize different engagement strategies in the classroom

STAGE 2 - ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task:

- Pre - Survey
- Post - Survey
- Classroom Assignments

Other Evidence:

- Daily observations of individual, partner, and group work
- Participation in class activities

Lesson: 1

Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will be introduced to what making inferences is like.

Student Engagement Focus: Music

Prior Learning: This will be used about two months into school starting. Students should have a pretty good understanding of what the expectations are, but still might struggle with the overall focus from time to time. Students should have some prior knowledge in third grade of how to make an inference.

Lesson Format:

When focusing on music it should have a purpose no matter what the task is. It can be to relax, engage and help students' memory depending on the lesson. The music I chose for this lesson was research and experience based from my project as well as what has worked for my students in the past.

Go Noodle is a popular option for students to dance and be active.

Flocabulary is a great resource for most educational subjects and topics.

Classical Music works well for students during studying or quiet work time to help focus.

[Exercise/Dance](#)

[Focus/Relaxing](#)

[Mozart](#) - studying/work time

[Kidzbop](#) - dance / have fun

[Flocabulary](#) - educational hip hop songs

1. Teacher explains: “When you hear the [music](#) start you should get out your Language Arts materials on your desk and do ten jumping jacks or your favorite dance move. When the music stops, I want you to gather at the benches.”
2. Students will dance or exercise when the music starts and then gather at the benches in the front of the room when the music ends.
3. Teacher explains: “ Today we will incorporate music into our lesson. Each one of you should work as hard as you have before, but we will be giving this a try and see how it goes.”
4. Teacher will instruct the lesson plan about making inferences. “ For an inference to take place there needs to be your own background knowledge and the text (or some form of information) given. Let’s read through some examples and practice this as a group first. (Materials for “inferences lesson” not included.)
5. Listen and practice examples from [Flocabulary](#)
6. During student work time, [classical music](#) will be playing lightly in the background.
7. Teacher explains: “When you hear the music turn off, you may quietly put your materials in your desk.”

Connection to Next Lesson: This will be important because of the routine that we will be building. Students will be asked to be prepared and transition to the next subject.

Assessment: Formative. Teachers will be observing how students interact with their peers as well as the teacher during instruction. Did student work time improve or not? How come?

Teacher Preparation: Have music chosen and supplies ready for activity if needed. Have your own “Inferences” lesson prepared for students.

Lesson: 2

Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will be able to make an inference from a group read aloud and share with their classmates.

Student Engagement Focus: Flexible Seating

Prior Learning: Students have been introduced to what making and inference is like along with some practice examples. This will carry over for deeper understanding.

Lesson Format:

I chose these flexible seating options because of research and positive feedback that I found and experienced myself. Having a plan set up with different options works best for all students' needs.

1. Teacher explains: “Gather your materials at your desk and meet at the benches in the front of the room. This time students will have flexible seating options (own chair, wiggle stool, squishy seat, stand near group).”
2. Teacher explains: “ Today you will have multiple choices for seating options. You can use your original chair, a wiggle stool, squishy seat or stand near your desk during instruction and work time. During the lesson you will be given options to move to other seats to help your understanding with making inferences.”
3. Teacher explains: “Pod One will have the wiggle stools, Pod Two will have the squishy seats, Pod Three will have standing desks, Pod Four will have regular chairs.” Students are divided into four pods and will rotate when necessary during the lesson. It is important that expectations are set and that students are not moving around too much and not discussing ideas with their pods.
4. Teacher will read _____ book with multiple examples of making inferences.

5. Teacher explains: “ When you have an inference about _____ character stand up and move to _____ pod. If your inference is about _____ character move to _____ pod and so on.
6. Share your thoughts and inferences with the students at your group. Give the example and why you had this inference.
7. At the conclusion the class can share their thoughts about the flexible seating options and what they liked or didn’t like about their options.

Connection to Next Lesson: This will help be another building block on finding ways to see what works for students to be engaged. The lesson should connect well with what students know about making inferences along with the examples they shared with their partners.

Assessment: Formative. The teacher will be making notes and observing what went well today. Did students participate more or were the flexible seating options a distraction?

Teacher Preparation: Have flexible seating prepared and ready to go as well as mentor text for reading.

Lesson: 3

Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will be able to complete multiple examples of what making and inference is and share with the class.

Student Engagement Focus: Technology - iPad: Pear Deck

Prior Learning: Students will be a few months into using their iPads and how to use Pear Deck.

Lesson Format:

Pear Deck lesson at the end of the project. This lesson really engages and helps students understand the essential questions and tasks. Make sure to practice this lesson beforehand as a teacher to better understand how to handle the technology.

1. Teacher explains: “ Get Lang. Arts materials out and log into the Pear Deck code on your iPad.” Students will be logging in and there will be a first question of *What do you know about Making and Inference so far?*
2. Teacher explains: “Today we will be learning more about inferences while using Pear Deck. There will be multiple slides for you to engage by writing your answer that I can see as well as your peers.”
3. First slide: “What two characteristics make up an inference?” Students write answers in Pear Deck slides so the teacher can see and then later show the rest of the class.

<p>4. Example of other slides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Read the short passage and highlight two inferences that you had (prepare to explain why) b. Watch a short video and give at least one inference you had about the characters in it c. Look at this picture and share an inference you have (written on the slides so the teacher and peers can see) <p>5. Last slide students will write what they have learned today and how they rate themselves understanding making inferences. (slides will have space to write as well as a 1 2 3 to rate themselves.</p>
<p>Connection to Next Lesson: Students are continuing to build practice and knowledge about making inferences. The next lesson will add on to what they know with more challenging examples.</p>
<p>Assessment: Formative. The teacher can get a strong understanding how students feel and know about making inferences with the multiple slides of feedback.</p>
<p>Teacher Preparation: Have Pear Deck slides prepared and double check internet connection.</p>

<p>Lesson: 4 -7</p>	<p>Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences</p>
<p>Student Objective: Students will be able to complete multiple examples of what making and inference is and share with the class. Students will have options on how they want to practice learning the content.</p>	
<p>Student Engagement Focus: Technology / Student Choice</p>	
<p>Prior Learning: Students will have a few days of prior knowledge about making inferences. They will be ready to go deeper in their learning.</p>	
<p>Lesson Format:</p> <p><i>Make sure options are laid out for students to access. It is important that they know all the options and have the choice to try more than one. This helps give them independence and ownership of their own learning. I chose these options because of what has worked in the past for my students as well as what has been researched and accepted from an educational standard.</i></p>	

1. Teacher introduces today's making meaning lesson in a whole group setting.
2. Students will be divided into four different groups for the activity.
3. Teacher explains: "During our work time today there will be some options/stations."
 - a. Small group work time with para
 - b. IXL/Academic websites for educational exploration on making inferences
 - c. Partner read Scholastic/TFK articles and underline and explain inferences to each other
 - d. One on one support time with teacher
4. There will be a list of all the stations with the students' groups next to each station.
5. This lesson will carry on for three to four class periods. Students will rotate stations every 10 minutes.
6. If students finish with one article there will be more to choose from as well as IXL options.

Connection to Next Lesson: Students are continuing to build practice and knowledge about making inferences. The next lesson will add on to what they know with more challenging examples.

Assessment: Formative and Summative. The teacher can get a strong understanding how students feel and know about making inferences with the multiple slides of feedback. This goes with para input as well as your own. There will also be some data from IXL and the articles that students are completing and turning in.

Teacher Preparation: Have stations set up with where students will be. Multiple articles for students to make inferences on as well pencils available if needed.

Lesson: 8

Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will be actively participating in some role playing with making inferences. Students should gain a better understanding of what and how making an inference can take place in text as well as the real world.

Student Engagement Focus: Classroom Climate

Prior Learning: Students have learned for multiple days on what making inferences is along with practicing examples to deepen understanding.

Lesson Format:

Building the classroom climate takes time and patience, but can go a long way for the teacher and student. Students need to understand that the teacher believes and trusts them so they will give that back in return. Also is said from student to student. You know you have a strong classroom climate when students know what is expected and they truly care about others as much as themselves. I chose this skit and options because of what relates to students and important for them to know.

1. Teacher explains: “Today we will be showing evidence of making inferences through some role playing. Students will be placed in small groups along with multiple skit options to present to the class. The rest of the class will be with their small groups and will be writing down what they infer from the skits given. We will see how wide the range is in the class' explanations of inferences are after the skit is over. This will show how even though we all see the same picture, there can be multiple ways to interpret or infer it.”
2. Students will have a chance with their small groups to discuss different roles and how they want to present to the class.
 - a. Some example skits:
 - i. An outdoor recess experience (good or bad)
 - ii. Lunchroom scenario
 - iii. Sports examples (being picked last or how to handle a bad call one way)
 - iv. Siblings scenario
3. Each small group will present to the class and each group will write down a few inferences they have about the characters or why they are feeling a certain way.
4. At the conclusion of the lesson, the class will debrief what they saw and heard and why they might think certain groups had different inferences than they did.
5. It is important that throughout this lesson that each student has a role and feels involved with their group's skit.
6. During the debriefing session each student will be writing down their thoughts on a separate sheet of paper. This gives the opportunity for each student to take the time to think on their own what they inferred and give their response.

Connection to Next Lesson: This will tie in great for extra practice before students begin to

create their own project/presentations.

Assessment: Formative. The students will show evidence in their answers and how they present themselves during the skits if they understand how to make correct inferences. The teacher should see a great increase in classroom climate as well as strengthening the relationships with each other.

Teacher Preparation: Have small groups set up for the students. The skit examples should be prepped for student use. Make sure students have an example to go by before they start.

Lesson: 9

Topic: Lang. Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will have educational options when learning about making inferences.

Student Engagement Focus: Student Choice

Prior Learning: Students have had multiple days of practice with making inferences from examples and sharing with their classmates.

Lesson Format:

Make sure for student choice that the options are explained and students know what is expected of them. Research has shown that this is a great way for students to gain independence and take ownership of their learning. I chose these options for my class because of what is available and what students are familiar with. This can change from class to class, but make sure students are familiar with it and know what is expected.

1. Teacher introduces the lesson for making inferences.
2. Teacher explains after the lesson is over: "Today there will be some options when we get to our student work time."
 - a. Students will be creating their own project on what they know about making inferences. Each will need to present at least three things they have learned from making inferences. This can be written or shared with examples.
 - b. One option will be to create a poster board (with or without a partner)
 - c. Another option is to create a Google Slide presentation for students to view with the same requirements.
 - d. A third option is using Flip Grid to present a video of you explaining with examples what making an inference is.
3. Students will get two class periods to build and practice their presentations for the class.

Connection to Next Lesson: This will be the last lesson before students complete a summative assessment and survey.

Assessment: Formative and Summative options. This will depend on what option students choose. The teacher should receive good feedback on how well the student understands the content.

Teacher Preparation: Have calming music prepped and ready to play.

Lesson: 10

Topic: Language Arts - Making Inferences

Student Objective: Students will be completing a summative assessment on making inferences as well as completing a survey of what engagement strategy they liked the best.

Student Engagement Focus: Student - Teacher Relationship

Prior Learning: Students have had multiple lessons focused on making inferences as well as opportunities to practice and show what they know to the teacher and their peers.

Lesson Format:

Building a strong student - teacher relationship takes time and work. For some students it can happen over weeks, while others are months. Research and experience has shown that this can take time and it varies from student to student, but all of it is vital to getting the most out of your students. I chose this option for my lesson because it gives a nice summary of what has evolved over this short time period. It can be hard to really put it into words, but this is an option that can be built on over time.

1. Teacher explains today's task about students completing the summative assessment as well as filling out the student survey on their iPad about their thoughts and feelings on the different student engagement options.
 - a. Survey questions for example:
 - i. What engagement strategy did you feel helped you focus and learn the best? Why?
 - ii. What strategy did the least for helping you focus and learn during this lesson? Why?

- iii. How was your overall last few weeks at school?
- iv. What strategy would you like to see more available for you to use?
Why?

- 2. When the students complete the survey, the teacher will get a chance to see and review the feedback. This will help strengthen the teacher/student relationship in the classroom and increase student engagement.
- 3. Student - Teacher Relationships grow when there is transparency and trust between each other. When there is participation and feedback on both sides of the relationship that is where the growth happens. It doesn't really matter what type of feedback is shared, but that the student feels that they are heard.
- 4. Make sure as the teacher that you give each student a fair shot and understand where they are coming from. This survey is just one part of the building of the relationship between student and teacher. To have great success with this, types of activities and behaviors like this need to happen each day throughout the school year.

Connection to Next Lesson: This will be a good way to assess how students felt the lesson went as well as get some feedback on what they learned.

Assessment: Summative. Students will complete both the assessment and survey, which will conclude the lesson and give great feedback for what went well for the students to help engage them in the classroom.

Teacher Preparation: Have student survey and assessment ready.

Name: _____

Student Engagement
Pre Survey

1. **What are your overall thoughts about school? Why?**
2. **What does your best learning environment look and sound like?**
3. **How do you like to learn: Visually, Auditory, or Tactile (Hands on)?**
4. **What barriers get in the way of you learning from time to time?**
5. **Anything else you would like to share to better understand how I can help you be as engaged as possible in our learning environment?**

Name: _____

Student Engagement
Post Survey

- 1. What engagement strategy did you feel helped you focus and learn the best? Why?**
- 2. What strategy did the least for helping you focus and learn during this lesson? Why?**
- 3. How was your overall last few weeks at school?**
- 4. What strategy would you like to see more available for you to use? Why?**
- 5. Any other thoughts or information that you would like to share to help make your school day more successful?**

Lesson 3

Technology

4th Grade Making Inferences Pear Deck Lesson

Lesson 9

Student Choice

1. Poster Board

- a. Explain what an inference is.
- b. Have at least three examples of making inferences. This can be from a book, article, picture, short movie clip, etc.
- c. Add any other thoughts about making inferences.
- d. Take your time and make sure to add color.

2. Google Slide Presentation

- a. Slides include: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion
 - i. Share at least three examples of making an inference
 - ii. Explain what an inference is
 - iii. Add pictures and make slides easy to read. (color, sentence length).

3. Flip Grid Presentation

- a. Explain what an inference is.
- b. Have at least three examples of making inferences. This can be from a book, article, picture, short movie clip, etc.
- c. Make sure that we can see and hear you clearly for your recording.

- ***Each presentation should be between 1-2 minutes long.***