Exemplary Instruction Commentary: History Social Studies

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1. Which lesson or lessons are shown in the video clips? Identify the lesson(s) by lesson plan number.

[Clip 1: Lesson 1 – Opening activity preassessment of prior knowledge of communism, use of the Venn Diagram to describe characteristics and examples of communism and capitalism (9:09 in length). Clip 2: Lesson 4 – Opening activity, an informal assessment and review of homework assignment. Students share out summarized definitions of confirmation bias and groupthink. Students also share out present day examples of these terms to demonstrate analysis and application of new vocabulary (8:34 in length).]

2. Promoting a Positive Learning Environment: In response to the prompt, refer to scenes in the video clips where you provided a positive learning environment. * How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to students with varied needs and backgrounds, and challenge students to engage in learning?

[In clip 1 (:18-30) I prompted the whole class with a question about sharing out examples they draw their previous knowledge about communism from. Cliff offered up the idea of “movies” and when I asked him for a specific example he could not think of one. I thought I did an effective job of giving Cliff a moment to think of an example and then affirmed him, saying “that’s okay” when he couldn’t think of one. Cliff is a frequent sharer in class discussion and I noticed throughout this lesson segment that whenever we were recording he was nervous and very aware when the camera was on him. As such, I knew it was important not to push him in the moment for an example if he couldn’t think of one. In clip 1 (2:03 – 2:28) I invited the whole group to “remind me what we use a Venn diagram for.” When I heard “comparing and contrasting” I affirmed the students’ correct answers with positive tone in my voice and repeated the phrase back to them. Further, I congratulated Ryan after she generated the idea of contrasting capitalism with communism. I said to Ryan, “that is a great guess and in fact what we are going to use.” In clip 1 (4:40) I encouraged Mazey to share out with the whole class a great answer that he said to just his table group. I prompted him saying: “Mazey you said something under your breath that I thought was a key distinction about our class system. Mazey replied, “it is unintentional.” This was an example of responding to a student’s strength and idea in the moment and encouraging him to share out as we were building and constructing meaning. I did this to applaud and encourage Mazey and other students that our collective knowledge grows when we work together by sharing our thinking out loud and to affirm to Mazey and others that our classroom is a safe space to do so. In clip 2 (:01-07) I encouraged students to share out with the whole class saying “Marcus and Will I heard you ask your group a great question... about confirmation bias.” Both of these students had been absent for a few days recently and I wanted to encourage them that they were on the right track. Then when Anny shared out from their group clip 2 (:32) I affirmed her answer by saying “nice, very good.” The majority of clip 2 represents opportunities for student voice through an oral discourse which served as an informal assessment for students demonstrate their learning of the previous day’s vocabulary words (groupthink and confirmation bias) by applying them to present day examples. This sharing out offered space for some of the most salient examples to come to light and provided anchor examples for students to ground their learning.]

3. Engaging Students in Learning: Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.
a. Describe your strategies to elicit student expression of their understanding of the learning target(s) and why they are important. (Optional, if evidence is provided in the student self-reflections in the Assessment task; evidence may also be provided by responding to this prompt.)

[In clip 1 (2:36) I prompted Mazey and Lucy to use “prior knowledge” and referred back to their partnered warm up activity to share out with the group characteristics they knew about communism. In the clip we see them both turn back in their notes to read what they had written down. This was an effective use of me referring to the previous activity and the syntax students used for their individual written discourse as well as their shared understanding from the partnered, small group oral discourse. In clip 1 Cliff (6:00) shares out a correct answer and I affirmed his correct answer by saying “great!” and prompted him to “say more about that.” Cliff offered up a thorough and accurate answer about capitalist competition that I paraphrased and added to our Venn diagram. This opportunity provided a great chance to check back in with Cliff and give him another opportunity to share out and feel successful. In clip 2 (0:13-:20) I said “we are going to recap these three new terms from yesterday and make sure that we all know them.” In clip 2 (1:12) Jovan shared his examples of stricter guns laws in response to mass shootings being an example of confirmation bias. I thought his use of the pronoun “they” was confusing so I asked him to clarify his example by saying “so, say more about what side are we on there. Whose finding what evidence to confirm what they already believe to be true?” I was positively asking for clarification and reflecting back our shared definition of confirmation bias in my question.]

b. Explain how your instruction engaged students in developing the skills of interpretation or analysis in relation to accounts of historical events or social studies phenomena and building and supporting arguments

[Clip 1 (3:16) – Ross said “money goes to private companies.” I reframed his statement as “private ownership and corporations” on the Venn diagram. This was a choice I made as intentional reference to previous social studies vocabulary. Moreover, I used these terms to more directly contrast the characteristics of communism we had been building. I continued to promote inquiry skills throughout the Venn diagram activity. I asked “what are other details or aspects of communism that stand out to you?” Niles (3:38) offered and insightful and nearly inaudible answer. I had been doing a consistent job of paraphrasing and reiterating what students had been saying up until that point as a strategy for engagement and affirmation. Additionally, I knew that would be necessary for Niles who is typically soft spoken and was sitting far away from the camera. Niles said, “abolishment of the class system” and then I asked Niles “why is that?” This follow up question encouraged Niles to demonstrate analysis about how the communist system creates the absence of class. Again, Niles’s answer clip 1 (3:47-4:00) is nearly inaudible so I repeated and paraphrased what I heard for the whole class. I said, “okay, nice. So, the abolishment of the class system means raising the lowest class up?” I waited for Niles to agree with my question and then we all added his statement to our diagrams. In clip 2 (:37) I asked “what happens Cosmo in the case of confirmation bias if you encounter evidence to the contrary?” I waited a few seconds and Cosmo seemed confused or reticent to participate so I rephrased my question and added details. “If you are blinded by confirmation bias and you come across something that disproves your hard and fast thesis what do you usually do with it?” Cosmo replied, “you ignore it.”]

c. Describe how your instruction linked students’ prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning.

[In clip 1 (:50–1:40) I referred back to the 10th grade world history interview project that many students in that class had completed. My goal was draw upon their prior knowledge and possibly any emotional memories they might have about interviewing a family member. Additionally, I referred to our lesson 1 learning target 2 (i.e. does the USA or USSR bear responsibility in starting the Cold War?) as a framing strategy about where we
are going with our learning throughout the lesson segment. This was preceded by my question about cultural artifacts, references and prior knowledge students could recall about communism and they mentioned movies, video games and hearing parents talk about Communism who had “lived through the Cold War” (:40-50). In clip 1 (5:47) I referred to my circulating around the room at the start of class and a characteristic of communism that I had heard and that no one had yet shared out. I did this to encourage and promote sharing out of ideas to promote thinking out loud and to encourage students to trust their prior knowledge. I said that I heard someone say “cooperation is a key aspect of communism – what might be the contrast in capitalism?” In clip 2 (5:09) I referred to “Mazey made the point yesterday over-judgmental and critical of people” which was meant to simultaneously affirm Mazey’s connection the day before and remind students of how they felt and what they remembered from the previous day. At the conclusion of clip 2 (7:48-8:34) I reviewed and drew upon what we learned from the previous day’s activity (i.e. Lesson 3 House of Cards) and how I wanted to encourage them to consider how they felt and what they knew. I shared that I hope they would remain skeptical and open to critiquing both sides as we moved through a lecture and discussion about the Second Red Scare. I called upon the feelings and frustrations from the previous day and challenged them to consider that I was the “bad guy” and that they had followed my directions as absolute truth. This was a reference to the previous day’s reflections where students were upset with me because they had said considering my ethos, they expected me to be a credible and honest authority figure. I had deceived them and they didn’t know who to believe. I referred back to that feeling of deceit as the central lesson from the activity to look out for a parallel throughout the Second Red Scare lecture and discussion.

4. Deepening Student Learning during Instruction: Refer to examples from the video clips in your explanations.

a. Explain how you elicited student responses that supported your students’ ability to form interpretations or analyses about history/social studies sources or accounts and build and support arguments.

[In clip 1 (2:45-3:05) Mazey shared out some of his prior knowledge about communism saying “it was the USSR, you worked, gave all money to the government and the government redistributed it equally.” I modeled for the whole class by interpreting and paraphrasing back to Mazey his answer to make sure I understood what he was saying. Then I added it to the Venn diagram vocabulary syntax and affirmed his answer saying “nice” at the end of my statement. I continued to elicit student responses that supported the conclusion that communism and capitalism have contrasting characteristics. In clip 1 (3:08) I asked, “how might we contrast that with the capitalist system?” Rather than just listing off all characteristics about communism, I thought it was important to begin this back and forth between both concepts for students to develop parallel examples that explain the key distinctions between these two foundational concepts. In clip 1 (6:55 – 9:09) I incorporated student responses to help me construct cohesive examples about how and why people are paid different amounts of money in capitalist economies. I used the phrase “thought experiment” to get students to imagine along with my hypothetical examples. I incorporated ideas from Mazey, Ben and Lucy about the amount of time, skills and education as reasons that may determine value of the employee and how much to pay them. I shared out the McDonalds checker example and contrasted it with the specialty lawyer example to illustrate to students that it is not simply skills or hours worked that determine how much you are paid. I reiterated this conclusion with the warranting statement: “the larger market force or the demand for what the product is that you are selling” determines how much a worker is paid. These examples proved to be effective to illustrate capitalism’s contrasting features to communism Moreover, this example in particular allowed students to consider aspects of their own cultural and economic context that they had possibly never before encountered. In clip 2 (:20-36) I asked Anny to share out her understanding of confirmation bias and I applied her definition to the example “use that information to reinforce Aha! I’m right!” This helped to model to students the interplay of incorporating and expanding off of another person’s evidence or example. In clip 2 (2:48) Ella started to say that it is okay to move on that she didn’t need to share her example. I encouraged
her however, to share out her family friend’s experience that not only proved to be relevant to the communist experience of confirmation bias, but it ended up being a great example. I stayed with Ella and asked further clarifying questions about class and cultural distinctions to model inquiry to further meaning and also to encourage her willingness to share out. In clip 2 (5:23) Ross responded to my question about social media and confirmation bias with an eloquently stated understanding saying that such tools encourage people “stay within their own bubbles” and that they just follow the accounts they want. He further made the connection to confirmation bias and groupthink by stating, “as a result they won’t see opposing opinions. And when they do they disregard it. Basically, it’s the exact same thing as confirmation and groupthink.” This provided and excellent summary of the parallel between then and now and demonstrated critical understanding and application of the new vocabulary concepts. In clip 2 (5:45) I incorporated and confirmed students evidence about confirmation bias, groupthink and social media and described what how I have witnessed the discourse and utility of social media change since its inception, when I was roughly age (i.e. 15 years ago). By drawing on this relevant example of these social studies phenomena in their lifetime I was able to connect their experiences and observations about how we can still witness groupthink and confirmation bias today and how they are fueled by the new medium of the day (i.e. social media). This example of social media and political/ideological echo chambers set up an understanding for students to follow the impacts that comic books and television had in furthering anti-Communism fear across the Second Red Scare in the 1950s.]

b. Describe and cite examples from the clips of how you supported students in using evidence from sources to build and support arguments about historical events, a topic/theme or social studies phenomenon.

[In clip 1 (4:55-5:45) I demonstrated to my students my synthesis of their evidence into one cohesive narrative about the relationship between communism and capitalism as explained through their examples of class systems and ownership. I incorporated some evidence from an earlier section in the day that I asked them to consider as a prompt. I said “someone this morning said that the system is inevitable what might they mean by that?” Ben replied “it’s necessary.” I reiterated what Ben said and reframed it by saying instead “or it’s consequence or a result of private ownership. So, as we have people who own things or build up more capital they have more flexibility and opportunity to gain more capital and that class system or stratification begins to emerge. In contrast if we pay our money to the state and there is equal ownership over the corporation (* this was a mistake, I should have said factory or machinery instead) and not private ownership of stocks that you could.” I incorporated Ben’s answer to help me zoom out from characteristics and contrast the terms through a more comprehensive example. In clip 2 (6:30) Noah offers and outstanding example about ‘flat earther’ theory being furthered and unduly amplified through the loud speaker of the internet. He describes the problem as small groups with unpopular opinions being “shouted around in an echo chamber.” I applauded his example and offered my interpretation of what he said and summarized that the internet has helped to promote erroneous and bad science and that it has amplified people with opinions that are otherwise fringe that might not otherwise have the same footing in a classroom, church, community setting. Noah’s example was an illuminating connection to a relevant present-day example that demonstrated direct application of the vocabulary and a thorough conceptual understanding.]

c. Explain how you and the students used tools and/or strategies to assist them in reflecting on what they are doing well and/or what they need to improve. Provide time stamp references for examples in the clip(s) or refer to the use of written tools for the lesson(s) seen in the clip(s).

[In clip 1(4:08) I continued with the inquiry by asking “is there a class system in capitalist society?” Ross shared out “yes, but not strict.” I challenged Ross to explain more and refine what he meant. I asked “When you say not strict, what do you mean.” Ross provided an answer about the rigidity of classes in America and the movement that is possible between them. I continued the inquiry by responding to Ross asking “So can I say there is flexibility?” He confirmed my response. Clip 2 (4:10) – Cosmo shared his idea that confirmation bias
perpetuated through media can turn into and promote groupthink creating political, ideological extremes. He recognized that these social studies phenomena promote polarizing thinking. This was an outstanding answer and cogent connection he made. I encouraged him by affirming “that’s very well said and before we actually move on, because that is such a good example, let’s consider the role social media plays in furthering confirmation bias.” This strategy of applauding Cosmo’s connection was intentional for two reasons. The first was I wanted his classmates to pause and consider what a great connection and example he had made. Secondly, Cosmo had seemed a little disconnected at the start of class and a little slow to participate (see example clip 2:50 he offers only a one or two-word answer). As Cosmo’s participation increased across this clip it was an important reminder of the strategy to keep looping back to students and give them a chance to warm up and get in the groove.]

5. Analyzing Teaching: Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.

a. What changes would you make to your instruction—for the whole class and/or for students who need greater support or challenge—to better support student learning of the central focus (e.g., missed opportunities)? Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (e.g., students with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

[In clip 1 (1:00-1:10) I asked the whole group to “summarize what the activity was about” — in reference to the communism interview project form the previous school year. This proved to be an ineffective question as Ross and Emma both responded: “I remember doing it but I completely forget what it was about.” My question was too broad and was an unrealistic ask for students to summarize a project from more than a year ago. I should have instead asked them “to describe something you remember about they interview project” or “who did you talk to? or what did you remember them telling you about how they felt about communism?” Such questions would have been more specific and possibly easier for students to recall considering the relational memory (i.e. the relationship they have/had with their interview subject). Another area for improvement during clip 1 was when I asked students multiple prompting and clarifying questions about the essential characteristics of communism or capitalism. I think a beneficial language support that would improve this lesson could be a guiding questions syntax – a hard copy list of the guiding questions that I am going to ask as we fill in the Venn diagram. This way students could prepare their answers ahead of time and guide their engagement throughout the activity. For example, in clip 1 (6:30) when I asked “how are people paid in a communist society?” this question seems to come out of nowhere and Ross still provided a solid answer. I believe however, that if students had known that question was coming we could have more detailed and thorough answers. In clip 2 throughout the recap of the small group oral discourses I made a point to call on every group but one, the back-left group nearest the door. All three of those students choose to sit there (i.e. farthest from the font) and have often not shared out or volunteered to read unless called on. I am familiar with two of the students being deep thinkers and I am sure they had great examples to share out. I missed out on hearing from their table during this clip about their table group discussion. I think I need to design some kind of reminder for myself on my clipboard to visually cue me into checking in with each table group during whole group discussion. In clip 2 numerous students shared out such insightful and cogent applied examples (Ross (5:23), Cosmo (4:10) and Noah (6:30) to name a few) of these social studies phenomena in our lives today. I wish I would have provided space in the guided notes and required note-taking of at least two of their classmates’ relevant examples. As I observed three days later, as students shared out their propaganda posters, many presenters provided less nuanced and less precise examples about how their own creation, the propaganda posters, conveyed or furthered confirmation bias or groupthink. Across those three days of class periods and a weekend, the precision and clarity of students’ applied examples had decreased. I believe if students had had the opportunity to write down and even discuss in small groups that the examples (seen in
b. Why do you think these changes would improve student learning? Support your explanation with evidence of student learning and principles from theory and/or research.

[In clip 1 (1:00) by cold calling students to remember the activity from their prior class it seemed to come out of the blue. I think I would include that question in the written preassessment questions next time to encourage students to first individually reflect on their work as Piaget encourages teachers to build in such reflection time for students to connect their current learning to previous experiences. Furthermore, students would have been able to work together to jog each other’s memories in small group sharing before the whole class which would have been further aligned with Piaget’s research by allowing students the space to see how learning targets build upon each other. By allowing students to make the connection themselves that our learning targets paralleled the ‘revisionist/traditionalist interview project’s’ learning target it would provide for a more meaningful connection to the work. Students would have been allowed the space to make such inferences and connections on their own rather me just telling them that there was a connection. Additionally, in clip 1 by including a list of the guiding questions that I was going to ask from the beginning of the Venn diagramming activity my visual learners would have had something to prepare their ideas on and to make notes for themselves. This might have encouraged a greater diversity of students to share out ideas throughout the activity in clip 1. As it was throughout that 9-minute clip, it is primarily just 6 students that shared out most of the answers. As I considered Howard Gardener’s research on multiple intelligences I looked back on this Venn diagram activity and see that without guiding questions this activity promoted the strengths of my auditory learners and was limiting to my visual learners in particular. The Venn diagram was an essential vocabulary syntax but it too could have been more structured and effective with those guiding questions. Prompting and guiding questions would have made for an additionally helpful language support for my students with 504 plans considering such a support would aid executive function challenges and give those students a chance to organize and prepare answers to share out if called on. In clip 2 I noticed my oversight of the table group closest to the door and my failure to check in with them during the oral discourse. This oversight is apparent upon review of this clip but without that structured reflection I wouldn’t have known. This example is a great reminder about the pertinence of frequent reflection-in-action as philosopher Donald Schon illustrates in his work The Reflective Practitioner. I need to build in these checks and balances for myself to reflect back on my teaching and strategies and not only consider reflection of student performance data as comprehensive reflection of my practice. Such an example means that I need to have other teachers and coaches help me to catch such an oversight. Additionally, I think reviewing and reflecting using video evidence of my teaching will be an essential tool to help me grow throughout my career. I think that my proposed strategy of a blank seating chart with the groups to track how often I am calling on certain tables and students who share out could provide additional data that might help me to ensure I am checking in with a greater number of students. Additionally, in clip 2 as I reflected on how cogent and nuanced some of the students examples were, I wished that I would have had students take those notes to enhance the practice of repetition to improve their understanding. David Ausubel refers to this practice and strategy of repetition as the” stability and clarity of emergent new meanings in cognitive structure.” Students had multiple opportunities and repetitions to encounter and practice these new vocabulary words and social studies phenomena. I however, think I missed a critical opportunity for additional repetitions and practice by failing to have students take notes and/or small group oral discourse of their peers’ examples. I could have included space along with the guided notes in the entry task. Or even I could have just had students write notes on one or two of the examples in their class notebooks, which Ausubel contends is another critical strategy for long-term memory forming.]