

## Teaching in the Field Reflection

Overall, my first experience with the visual inquiry technique was a very positive one—the planning, modifying, and actual teaching of the lesson all ran very smoothly. The feedback that my partner and I received from the students, as well as our CT, was all very encouraging. In fact, “positive” is almost an understatement—my partner and I were pleasantly surprised to find that *every single student* in the class participated in the lesson, including those we had rarely seen participate at other times. This fact, we agreed, spoke volumes about the visual inquiry technique and the potential it holds for getting students excited about social studies, which is, unfortunately, a subject that consistently ranks as one of the least popular among students.

As we embarked on our visual enquiry journey, the first step was asking our CT what the class would be studying that week in social studies. Once we had our topic (pioneers), we began to search for at least one, hopefully two, rich and interesting images that we could use for our lesson. We managed to find two—the first image is a painting of a family of pioneers working the land, their log cabin looming in the background, the second is a photograph of an extended pioneer family sitting in front of their house along with horses and a cow. Once we found our images, the next step my partner and I took was to familiarize ourselves with the state of Michigan’s social studies curriculum standards for fourth grade. Using these standards, we developed objectives for our lesson and fashioned them using relevant Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs. Next we created a number of Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 questions and checked to see if these reinforced our objectives—if they did, we kept them, if they did not, we modified them so they would. The final stage in planning our lesson was simply compiling all of this information in the Lesson Plan Format, and then we were ready and excited to teach our lesson.

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As indicated earlier, our visual inquiry lesson was a great success. We loved it, our CT loved it, and the students loved it, even asking after we finished— “That was it? Aww man! Can we keep going?” By this we inferred that this kind of activity was a real treat for them—it was something they had never done before, and it allowed them to look at social studies in a new, more exciting light. We began our lesson by explaining that we were going to be social studies “detectives.” Reflecting back, I think this seemingly insignificant statement played a key role in how well our lesson went, as it really seemed to grab the students attention right away (after all, what ten-year-olds do not like to play detective?) We then put the first image up on the Smart Board and asked the students the initiating question “what do you see?” Hands shot in the air, which foreshadowed how the remainder of the lesson would go. We discovered that although our fourth graders had not yet studied pioneers (they were not quite at that chapter in the social studies book as our CT had hoped), they were interested in the topic and had a lot of really insightful things to say. For example, one student responded to our initial question by, much to our dismay, basically answering all of our subsequent questions—“Well,” he said, “I see a family working out in the yard, and it is not just the men, but the mother is there too, which shows that the entire family had to do work. They seem to be planting crops or farming. The trees have been cut down, probably to make their log cabin and the fence, and that is why they are surrounded by tree stumps. Also, they live out in the woods, away from everyone else.” Granted, this was a particularly bright student, but my partner and I were taken aback by all of the details he had noticed in the image and the inferences he was able to make. The lesson continued in this fashion as we moved from our Level 1 questions to Level 2 and 3 questions, making sure to weave them all together as best we could and not hesitating to jump back and forth between the last two levels. The students were great participants and were what made our

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first experience such a success. We were especially happy to note, as was our CT, that all of the students participated, including those who usually appeared disinterested in school and rarely volunteered. Perhaps the greatest success story of the day was of one boy in particular, Jeremiah. Jeremiah receives some special education services and has never shown the faintest hint of interest in any school subject. We were surprised and ecstatic to see that, of all the students, he seemed the most interested in our lesson, shooting his hand up in the air every time to participate (needless to say, we made every attempt to call on him).

After hearing the students' responses to our questions, my partner and I felt that, with one exception, all of our objectives were met. The objective that was not met— "students will relate the second image to the first picture"—was the result of a failing on my and my partner's part, as we did not do a good enough job of communicating to the students that this was something we wanted to them to do. Therefore, one modification I would make to this lesson if I taught it again would be to make sure that at least one of my questions really forced the students to compare the two images. On the other hand, I felt we did an especially good job of meeting the objective: "students will compare and contrast their lifestyle to pioneer life (transportation, dependency on food...)." We made this one of our objectives partly because our CT had requested that we relate the self-sufficiency of the Native Americans that she had emphasized so much in the previous chapters to the self-sufficiency of the pioneers. After deliberating, we thought that a good way to get this point across would be to contrast the pioneers' lifestyles to their own very dependant lifestyles. It was a great success—the students were able to make this connection and then relate it back to what they had learned about Native Americans.

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Another more general thing I would want to note if I taught this or any other visual inquiry lesson again would be to make sure the image is large enough to really pick up on all of the small yet important details. At first, we had the image slightly too small on the Smart Board (mainly because we had never used one before and were unfamiliar with it) but once a student helped us enlarge the image, we found that the students were able to participate in much more productive and meaningful ways. Other than these two things, I would not make any changes to the lesson, and we had no negative feedback from the students or our CT to suggest we should do otherwise.

