Improving Literature Analysis Skills in a Grade 11 English Classroom

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Abstract
Eleventh-grade English students have a history of struggling with interpreting literature on standardized assessments. This study examines students’ ability to compare multiple texts to determine theme, analyze the author’s choices in creating the story, and define words in context. All of these concepts were taken from nationally aligned Common Core standards for literacy. The chosen research population was one class of 37 English 11 standard students in a suburban high school. The chosen key concepts were assessed through quarterly benchmarks. International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program rubrics were used to determine how these standards were met in the students’ analytical writing assignments. In addition to this, small activity-based formative assessments were used to analyze the students’ weaknesses in grasping each concept individually. By presenting engaging extracurricular material with a higher readability, students were able to analyze and interpret literature based on these standards. This falls in alliance with the chosen school’s improvement plan which is to increase the rigor of students’ reading materials. The selected population of students responded well to the change in instructional strategy and exceeded the target results by scoring higher on these standards on their second quarter benchmark.

Methods
In order to focus on the three problematic standards for students student proficiency was measured by using the selected students’ 1st and 2nd quarter benchmark exams and an analytical essay comparing and contrasting two different characters in The Crucible. In this essay, students must have used quotes from the text to back up their analysis. The impact of this analytical paper process is represented in the first graph below. To help students determine the definition of vocabulary in context, close annotated readings along with teacher-guided interpretations were incorporated often into The Crucible unit. Plickers, a kinesthetic QR code assessment method, helped to gather formative assessment data about student vocabulary acquisition for words selected from one of their reading passages. Students were also frequently required to compare their current reading with texts learned previously in the semester. Lastly, the Nearpod online lesson software was used to encourage student motivation and the prompt receipt of student work.

The Impact of Comparative Literary Analysis

Students’ Semester Grades over Two Quarters

Conclusion
The core concepts that were the focus of this study were mostly addressed through directly addressing these concepts during their analytical assignments such as annotated readings and writing an analysis paper. Student motivation to complete their work is very important. Chunking and regularly collecting student work greatly improves student grades. Chunking longer assignments like analytical papers also allows for “teachable moments” which can be directly guided toward the core concept competencies.

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