

I am still not exactly clear on what I am supposed to write or even what I am going to write in this "research" log. Maybe what I am supposed to do is write to understand. That happens to me a lot. I won't know where I am going until I get there until, WHAM!, it hits me and I understand. Hopefully that's the experience I am supposed to have with the research logs. So, for now, I am going to record what I *think* I know about Complex Instruction and see where it goes from there.

The main idea I got from lecture on Wednesday about C.I. is about status. Status is always a problem with working in groups. Studies (*maybe a good idea to look this up*) show that hands-on experience working in groups is a good thing for student learning and development. But the problem is that one or two students do most or all of the work and others do little to none, gaining nothing from the experience. Most of the time, students that are expected to perform better are the ones that dominate the group. Others that are expected to be lower achievers are not allowed to participate. What I gather about C.I. is that there are two treatments that help solve these status problems in groups (Multiple Ability Treatment and Assigning Competence to Low-Status Students). The use of these status treatments increases the talking of the low-status students. Talk and interaction is what increases learning.

*I've put Working for Equity in Heterogeneous Classrooms, Cohen & Lotan, Eds. 1997 on reserve, under CBE 4150. See Part II of this book!*

Through our first simulation in the groups, I gathered that certain group skills have to be learned before participating in C.I. I think she called the activities that build the skills *skillbuilders*. Listening and working together need to be learned before students can work in a group.

Another thing I know about C.I. is that the tasks in a C.I. unit are open-ended and discovery tasks. Students in multiple groups do different tasks at the same time. The key is to keep as many kids engaged as you can. That's how they learn. Since students have varied

abilities (*like we are going to learn in Foundations this semester*) the tasks will use multiple abilities. Some students are musical and others spatial. The key to C.I is to have students draw from each other's abilities. Students will learn to ask for each other's help. The first day of class when Dr. Whyte was introducing the semester to us, she drew a graph on the board. With C.I., all students make significant increases in learning because all students' abilities are being utilized by the entire group. Students are given multiple opportunities to grasp a concept in his or her own way.

The graph also showed us that low-achieving students make a steeper jump in achievement from the pre-test to post-test using C.I. By looking at the graph, it was apparent to see that the gap that widens between low and high-achieving students as they get older can actually begin to close through C.I. That is a very exciting prospect. I kind of know a little bit about C.I., and I am getting eager to learn how it actually works.

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Friday, January 24<sup>th</sup> was my first day at Opelika Middle School (OMS). I was extremely anxious because I wasn't sure what to expect. It had been so long since I'd been in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. And I couldn't believe someone was going to give me the responsibility of teaching those twenty-eight students something, even if it is something small.

Ms. Buckhalt eased my fears once I met her. She was this tiny little woman with lots of fire in her eyes for teaching. I could tell. She was also very prepared. She had a handout for each of the preservice teachers that had a class roster and a list of things she wanted us to know:

- She likes her students to call her Ms. B, and wants us to help them learn our names.
- Writing workshop in her class is not quiet.
- She wants us to walk around and ask questions to students during the writing time.
- She invited us to sit in on a history class.
- She wants us to use her email address.
- She reminded us of the times to call her at school as well as the phone number.
- She wants us to dress like professionals.
- She doesn't want us to chew gum.
- She wants us to find time to tour the school.
- She wants us to keep a list of questions for her to answer.
- She wants to form discussion groups instead of coming to her one person at a time.

In the first few minutes, I had a sense of the kind of teacher Ms. B is. Her first priority of the day was to get done what her class needed to get done; us being there was secondary. She told us that right up front. She's on a tight schedule because she is held accountable for teaching so many things to these students. Once she set up the class and allowed us to introduce ourselves, Ms. B jumped right into class. The class has just finished reading Lois Lowry's *The Giver*.

They were in the process of writing assignments about *The Giver*. We got to witness what a writing workshop is like in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. First, she asks students if they are having any problems or difficulties, if they are “stuck” in their writing. She asks students questions and both she and other students make suggestions about another student’s paper. They didn’t move on to the next student until the first had been helped and didn’t feel “stuck” anymore. Some students discuss while others write. Ms. B encourages students to write when they feel the urge to write.

Once all of the students were ready to write, they all began writing. Ms. B gathered a small group of students who were writing from the same prompt to help them all with their writing. Myself and the other preservice teachers were encouraged to walk around the room, helping students that needed help or even asking questions. If I had known I would be answering students’ questions, I definitely would have panicked. However, it didn’t panic me as much once I got started. It helped that I have read *The Giver* and that it is one of my favorite young adult novels of all time. Sometimes a few of us would be helping one child and got stuck. One of my team members, Courtney, had a problem with one student and asked me to help. She was extremely upset about it and even asked Ms. B what she should do when she feels she can’t help a student. Ms. B was extremely helpful as she talked to us.

I am so glad I got to witness a writing workshop, mostly because I never experience one until college. It was great to see how a 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher deals with writing in her classroom. She asks questions that provoke thought instead of telling students what they should write. Students assist each other. Students are free to move around the room. The room is noisy. But the most wonderful thing is that there was thoughtful writing going on in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, something I never experienced. My 7<sup>th</sup> grade English class was quiet; all we ever did were grammar lessons.

2<sup>nd</sup> visit to Ms. B's Class at OMS on January 31, 2003

Since I got caught by a train and was a few minutes late to class, the students were already taking our survey. After about 10-15 minutes of filling out the survey, Ms. B began writers' workshop once again. I love the writers' workshop. She began by telling about her writing process. They are working on opinion, or persuasive, papers now. She told the students about her process of choosing her opinion. She told them she wanted it to be something that she felt very strongly about, just like she had told them when they began the assignment. She told them about the other possibilities she entertained (such as year-round school) and the opinion she decided upon, banning smoking in public places.

Ms. B had the overhead on and had a copy of her opinion paper's opening paragraph to show the students. She had begun her paper with a quote and told students that was a wonderful way to begin a paper like that. She also stressed to them the importance of evidence to support the opinion. To illustrate, Ms. B had numbered each sentence of evidence in her paper. I thought that sharing her writing with the students was exactly the kind of thing that we talked about last semester in CTSE 6020.

I learned from 6020 that a writing teacher must also be a writer. Dr. Whyte has demonstrated that time and time again. I think it's a very good practice for more than one reason. I think it breaks down the barrier between teacher and student; the student feels like the teacher knows what he/she is going through because the teacher does the same work. It is also a good idea because of what we studied in my Foundations 3120 class this past week: modeling. People always model what a teacher does. Some people don't learn well unless they have a model or scaffold to go by. Most students can't simply follow written or oral directions. People are all different and have different ways of learning.

Once she modeled her own paper for them, she asked if anyone needed any specific help with their opinions. I am still in awe of the boldness these kids have in sharing their writing with the entire class. I know I wouldn't have been that vulnerable with my writing in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Some did need specific help, but Ms. B decided it would be more productive to help those people in one-on-one situations instead of with the entire class. They had put off the opinion papers in order to gather our opinions about them. What students do is write their opinion on a piece of paper. Then, other people read the opinion and write their own opinion about the original opinion. Students were instructed to write more than a "yes" or "no" on the paper. The purpose of this was to gather quotes to use in the paper. The other "new friends" (as Ms. B refers to us to the class) and I walked around the class, discussing opinions with students as well as each other.

Christy and I discussed with [REDACTED] about school uniforms. The administrators at OMS are discussing implementation of a stricter dress code and uniforms. Christy and I had completely different opinions. It helped [REDACTED] to have two different sides of an issue to discuss with us. Pretty soon, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] had joined in the conversation. It was a very rich conversation; I felt like everyone was listening to all of the sides of the issue. I know this can only make [REDACTED] opinion paper better because she has considered every aspect of it.

One student I felt particularly connected with was [REDACTED]. I felt connected to her from the second I saw her the first day of class. [REDACTED] is not shy at all. She was the most vocal one during writing workshops, always very opinionated. She reminds me of myself when I was that age. I could tell she was an extremely brilliant student. As far as academics go, I knew she was the one that most closely resembled me when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. When I was answering her opinion, I noticed the back of her shirt said "Dance Dance Dance." Then I knew she was probably the little sister I never had. I asked her if she danced, and I told her I danced the whole

time I was in school. It was great to related to these students on a more personal level. When students feel they can talk to you, I believe it creates a better learning environment.

#### What We've Discussed So Far About Our Units

So far, I think we have discussed combining the Alpha and Omega teams and teaching one extra long unit. I think this is a good idea because students would not have as much opportunity to get confused. We work well as a group so far. Ms. B told the ones that interviewed her that she would love to see us do a unit on short stories, have them write their own short stories, and then teach about revision. I think this is going to work well. I just hope it doesn't get too difficult to coordinate with seven people to deal with in a group instead of two groups of three and four. Overall, we just want what will be most beneficial to the students, and I think one seamless unit will be what is best for students. I hope Ms. B will work with us and give us her input on it.