Using Writing to Eliminate Gaps in Any Classroom

Academic Note

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This writing activity is one I use for review of content material and to allow students to demonstrate their content knowledge in my mathematics classroom. However, I feel it can be easily transferred to any classroom setting for the use of allowing students to demonstrate knowledge of content being studied. It combines the knowledge of writing friendly letters with an opportunity for students to show mastery of content.

As teachers we all know there is a great need for a variety of ways to review material covered in the classroom. For students to fully digest materials they need repetition and review, this activity allows for such. Students are given a way to involve writing in the review process that will give your students the variety and break they need from the everyday mathematics classroom.

Students are asked to pick a topic from a list of concepts that have been studied during the current unit of study that they feel they have mastered. They are to take this concept and write a letter to another student in the class, explaining how to solve this type of problem in detail. During their explanation they are to include any diagrams and/or examples that may help their reader understand the topic. Also in their letter they must include practice problems that relate to their chosen concept for their recipient to practice answering. Letters are taken through the review process to correct errors in grammar, format, as well as to clear up misconceptions of any mathematical ideas. After letters have been corrected, students exchange letters and are asked to apply this information through completing the practice questions given. Students then give their answers back to the person who wrote their letter in order for them to be evaluated by that person. This is another important part of the assignment because it asks students to evaluate the correctness of each others’ work, which is digging deeper into the depth of knowledge of this concept. Furthermore, this allows me to give students a grade on their writing piece as well as a grade for completing the mathematics problems correctly, presented in their letters. Furthermore, before a summative assessment is given I have time as the teacher to clarify any problems my students may still face dealing with this unit.

This particular activity could easily fit any grade or subject area. It is a good way to review material or a way to have students practice with content they are struggling with. Either way it gets students prepared to write and demonstrate what they know about a particular topic. Some of your students who may not excel in your content classes will be given a chance to use writing to help them excel. It allows students to grasp that deeper understanding of the content and helps to reveal any misconceptions your students may have.

Most students think of writing as something completed in Language Arts class. But writing to demonstrate learning can take place in any classroom and can prove to be very helpful. Students become so excited to get to write letters to their friends, they don’t mind that they have to add some information about things they have learned in class. This gives students time for repetition and review of any content material covered. Sometimes this is the only type of studying you can get your students to complete. Also peers may be able to explain to one another in a way which you weren’t able to. I find that this works well for my students in math.

Out of my research, I found two sources most helpful in developing this presentation. One was an article from Glencoe Online, “Integrating Writing into the Mathematics Classroom.” It offered suggestions for guidelines for assigning writing in the content classroom. The other was an article called, “Now I Get It,” by Susan O’Connell. The most helpful thing from this article was it gave all kinds of suggestions for communicating math ideas effectively. The ideas in the article could also be transferred for use in other subject areas.

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References

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O’Connell, Susan. *Now I Get It! Strategies for Building Confident and Competent*

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