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Using 3D Card-Making Project to Motivate Students' Writing

The author shares a middle school unit plan to engage students in a writing task through hands-on creative work.

Introduction

Inclusive education is "the process of enhancing the capability of the education system for all learners; this process has been recommended for the past three decades as best practice schooling for all students including those with special education needs (SEN)" (Chao, Sze, Chow, Forlin, & Ho, 2017, p. 360). There are several strategies recommended in inclusive education, such as outcome-based education, multiple intelligence theory, constructivist learning, cooperative learning, use of technology in the classroom, and peer-mediated instruction (Norman, Caseau, & Stefanich,1998). However, the level of stress that teachers in inclusive classrooms experience have been noticed by many scholars. High-stress levels and feelings of lack of support have led almost half of the Canadian teachers to quit their teaching career before retirement age (Katz, 2015). The other difficulties of implementing inclusive education in K-12 classrooms pointed out by McCormack, Stauffer, Fishley, Hohenbrink, Mascazine, and Zigler (2018) is that traditional special education preparation programs offer little direct connection to the general education content, assessment, and proficiency standards. At the same time, most general education programs, such as elementary education or secondary school education, offer content, assessment, and proficiency standards specific to disciplines or grade levels. Most general education methods courses do not significantly address strategies for teaching students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Thus, there is limited or no connection in supporting diverse learning styles, resulting in students with special needs feeling disconnected from the classroom learning environment.

Nowadays, language arts teachers have high chances of working with students with special needs and different learning styles. Teachers should adopt several interventions or innovative teaching approaches to maximize diverse learners' diverse learning needs in order to build an inclusive classroom. When we give a content-area topic to students in an English Language Arts class, some students may feel that they have no idea what to write on this topic since some of our students are visual learners, while others are bodily-kinesthetic learners. Therefore, we usually provide students with various activities to inspire their writing, including brainstorming, group discussion, watching short TV excerpts, or sharing informational news with them, playing games or organizing outdoor activities with them.

In this article, I offer a lesson idea especially beneficial for visual learners in an English Language Arts writing class. I share how to use a 3D card making project as a motivational activity to enrich students' writing in content areas.

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Students' Confusions on the Content of the Writing Task

"I have no idea about this topic." "I am not familiar with this topic." "I don't have anything to write on this topic." or "I am not interested in this topic." These are statements frequently heard from a writing class. When I hear these reactions, I think the students may be unfamiliar with the topic that I have given them or my students lack life experiences with this topic. Also, teaching students with diverse cultural backgrounds, I understand the frustrated feeling that students will have when they approach an unfamiliar topic. Thus, I use a visual approach – a 3D card project to inspire them before I ask them to do the writing task.

Logo Design

I asked my middle school students to write a mission statement for a non-profit organization. At the beginning of the class, I showed my students several non-profit organizations' logos in my PowerPoint to discuss what a few nonprofit organizations do. For example, I showed a logo of the Morris Animal Foundation (*Figure 1*). I asked students to analyze this logo and point out "How many animals can they see and how this logo design helps audiences to understand the mission of the organization."

Figure 1. Screen-print of the logo of the Morris Animal Foundation from its website. Photo © Morris Animal Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/
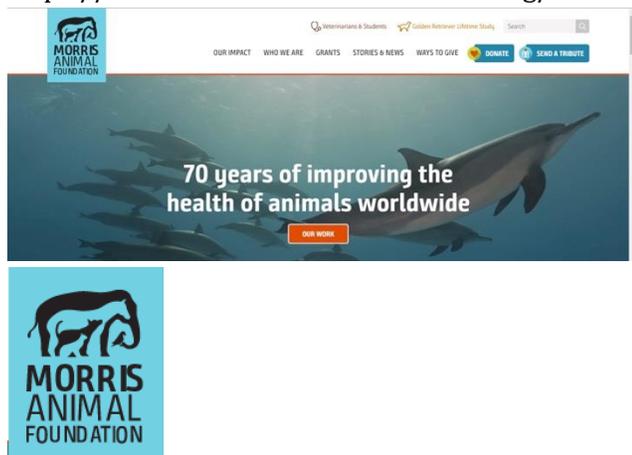
Students told me that they could see an elephant, a horse, and a cat in the logo. Then I reminded students about some art skills used in this logo design, including positive and negative space. The positive space means the main objects can be seen in the image, while the negative space means the background. In the logo design of the Morris Animal Foundation, the designer combined the positive and negative space. If we see the orange elephant in a first glance, the shape of the elephant occupies a positive space. While if we observe the white shape of animals inside the elephant first, this group of animals occupies the positive space. I told my students this is an example of artistic skill to use in their logo designs.

Logo Lettering and Slogans

I instructed my students how to design the logo letters. I introduced three types of letter designs to students including block letters, bubble letters, and crazy letters. I also told them they could add some shadows under the letters to depict a 3D effect. Finally, I encouraged students to find other nonprofit organization slogans. For example, we together looked at the website of the World Wide Fund for Nature Endangered Species Conservation. Their mission is to "conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth." I required my students to compose a slogan to express the mission of their nonprofit organizations.

3D Card Making

We moved on to make a 3D card which was folded paper of two pieces of the same sized paper. First, teachers can take out one piece of unlined paper and fold the paper vertically in half. Next, teachers can ask students to think how many items (e.g. the logo of the nonprofit organization and small cards written major services of the nonprofit organization) they want to place on the strips since this determines how many strips they need to draw. Teachers can instruct students each strip will be used to hold one item. Teachers should remind

Using 3D Card-Making Project to Motivate Students' Writing

students that they cannot cut the strips too long, otherwise when we place the items on the strips, the items would be placed outside of the cards. Also, teachers can instruct students that some of the strips could be drawn in long and some of them could be drawn in short, where the items placed in the long strips would look closer to us and the items placed on the short strips would look further away from us. Namely, the long and shortened strips can make a foreground and background effect. After doing the demonstration, teachers can instruct students to use pencils to draw the strips on the fobled side of the paper. Secondly, teachers can instruct students to cut the two sides of the lines on each strip and to pull these strips out. The final step is to use a new piece of paper to glue the paper with different sized rectangles with only the sides out together (see step by step demonstration in *Figure 2*).

Figure 2. Steps of making a 3D card. Artwork demonstration by the author.

Steps	Instruction	Images
Step 1	Drawing strips on the folding side of the paper	
Step 2	Pulling the strips out	
Step 3	Sticking two pieces of same-sized paper together	

In the *Hearts for Health* 3D card (see *Figure 3*), Anastasia used the element of a stethoscope to design her organization's logo and placed it in the middle of the 3D card. She intentionally designed the line of the stethoscope in a heart shape and colored it in red, which corresponds to the outline of the organization's buildings. Looking at the building design for the organization, Anastasia drew her organization's buildings in various heart shapes from large to small ones to show different departments in the organization. The interesting part is there are several bandages placed on the hearts to indicate that this is a place for solving health problems.

Figure 3. *The Hearts for Health,* 3D card made by Anastasia A. Mcmorris, photo by the author.

Another student, Abdiel Garcia, made a *Confused* 3D card (see *Figure 4*). He wanted to set up an organization that could help people to solve their confusions. In his logo design, he drew a large question mark and colored it with green and red colors. Also, he used block letters with added shadows to design the name of his organization. The interesting part of this name is the letter "o." He thought the letter "o" could be combined with the shape of the question mark. The question mark echoes the name of the organization entitled

Using 3D Card-Making Project to Motivate Students' Writing

Confused. In the background, he drew a series of fantastic houses, which looks like a discovery world. The question mark sculpture is placed inside of the yard to further indicate the purpose of his organization.

Figure 4. The Confused, 3D card made by Abdiel Garcia, photo by the author.

A Writing Task

The learning goals of the second day of the class are to continually finish the non-profit organization building designs, card cover designs, and then proceed to the writing task. I asked my middle school students to draw the buildings of their non-profit organization in the background. For the writing task, I provided them the following instruction: "Use the words that you have collected to write an essay in which you describe an issue that your organization is concerned about; use three paragraphs to develop your essay. When you finish the statement, underscore new words that you have learned or collected in your essay." Previously, I asked my students to read different non-profit organization statements after the first day of the class at home and collect 3-5 new words that they have learned from these statements. In the prompt, I provided them three guiding questions to facilitate their writings, including identifying an issue that your organization tries to solve, the action plan of your organization, and the significance of solving this issue in your community.

In the writing task, Anastasia mentions that she is concerned about health issues since these issues are commonly encountered in our lives. Some people are born with certain health issues, and others get sick because they don't take good care of themselves. Then, she describes how her organization tries to help by organizing fundraisers to help people who have been diagnosed with a virus and need help with financial support. Also, a blood drawing donation system is available for those who need fresh blood to fight the virus. In the conclusion part, Anastasia says that solving health issues is important in communities because if the virus cannot be killed, it will spread and many people will get sick.

Abdiel writes that there are many questions that confuse people every day. Thus, his organization *Confused* tries to help people solve anything that makes people feel confused. Then, he gives some examples in his essay. For example, he asks how to solve complicated math problems. Why does the spinner spin? What is the ice cream made of? Finally, he mentions that he hopes people can solve any confusing questions in his organization.

Findings of the Writing Task

In the writing task, most students show that they can identify an issue that their non-profit organization would like to solve. They can write the action plan that the organization would implement to solve the issues, according to what they have drawn on their 3D cards. Also, some students can articulate the significance of solving the issues in their communities. However, some students cannot clearly write why the issues that they have chosen are significant in their communities with the supporting arguments or examples. For future teaching, I would like to include some model texts related to the issues that they pointed out to enrich their writing development. I would also ask them to draw mindmaps in groups to discuss the

Using 3D Card-Making Project to Motivate Students' Writing

significance of solving the issues discussed in the article. Overall, the 3D card writing project can motivate students' writings and provide them with a series of visual data for their writings.

Conclusion and Classroom Implications

Using a 3D card project to inspire students' writing can help diverse learners in a writing class. With an increase in the number of pre-service teachers receiving instruction about teaching students with special needs, inclusive education will be widely implemented in future classrooms. The 3D card making project is one way to enlarge inclusive education in everyday teaching practice. After making a series of classroom activities, such as logo design, letter design, slogan design, and organization building design, diverse learners have more opportunities to learn about what a nonprofit organization looks like and what the purpose of a nonprofit organization is. This process helps students visualize their own organizations.

Students have different learning styles and preferences. This influences how they approach classroom learning and the kinds of activities they prefer or from which they learn most effectively (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Similarly, Gardner (2008) argues we have multiple intelligences, including visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, linguistic, and logical-mathematical. For example, dance requires skills in bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and spatial intelligence in varying degrees. In this project, visual-spatial students would get the most benefit in the learning process since there are a lot of visual logos introduced before the writing task starts.

Motivating students in the classroom presents an ongoing challenge for teachers. English Language Arts teachers can and should use a variety of strategies to improve students' educational experiences. A hands-on activity such as making a 3D card for a nonprofit organization allows teachers to maximize problem-solving, inquiry, and creative skills to engage students in

their academic tasks, thus resulting in a meaningful learning experience for all students.

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