

Positive Impact on Student Learning Assignment

Part I: Introduction to the Instructional Context and Content Focus

For this assignment, the specific content area is eighth grade Language Arts and there will be some Social Studies cross curriculum integration. As a focus for instruction and analysis, I selected my sixth period. This 50-minute class is comprised of twenty-six students- twelve males and fourteen females. Their ages range from thirteen to fifteen. Two of the twenty-six students have been retained and are supposed to be in high school, which attributes to some of the behavioral issues that those students exhibit during this class period. There are various ability levels in this class period. Five of the twenty-six students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and have to take tests in a separate setting. One of those students is an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. Students range from below grade level to academically gifted. Four of the twenty-six are classified as academically gifted in another content area. With the exception of a few, the majority of the students desire to do well. However, socializing and misbehavior sometimes prevents them from doing so. I moved into Phase III, which is the major responsibility phase, on February 11th, 2013. During the course of this phase, I will be teaching a unit entitled "Risking It All" with the specific focus on the young adult novel, The Diary of Anne Frank. At the start of this unit, we are going to be ahead of the 8th grade social studies teachers on the team. Therefore, it is crucial that I bridge my students with pertinent historical information on World War II, specifically

focusing on the Holocaust. When I planned my unit and content focus last semester in Methods, I anticipated that the students would have gotten the necessary background information on the Holocaust from their social studies classes to carry them through this unit. That would then allow them to make historical connections from the novel to events in history and what was going on around the time the novel was written. Since that was not the case, I decided to dedicate the first few days of my unit and Positive Impact project on the topic of the Holocaust. This content focus correlates with objective RI.8.3 of the Common Core for eighth grade Language Arts. The objective states: Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or *events*. It is essential that students study and remember the events of the Holocaust, not only for contextual understanding of the unit's novel, but more importantly to get students reflecting on and remembering all the individuals who suffered from this event. It was my hope that the students come to understand that the horrific events of the Holocaust must never be forgotten. Moreover, by exposing students to this historical event in a Language Arts class, I am incorporating cross-curriculum integration. As a dual certified educator, I feel it is extremely important and beneficial for building well-rounded learners.

Sixth period is neither the highest performing nor the lowest performing group of students, which was the basis for my decision to focus on them for instruction and analysis. To ensure that I was going to challenge and push all of my students, especially the few that are Academically Gifted, I created a short assessment on the Holocaust. This initial assessment enabled me to see what prior knowledge the students had on the subject matter. The results showed me that the

majority of students needed to learn the basics on the Holocaust. However, to ensure I don't lose the focus of the students with strong prior knowledge, I needed to incorporate higher order material, questions, and tiered assignments. Throughout my instructional sequence, I hoped to move all my students to the next level, and ultimately have a positive impact on their learning.

Part II: Instructional Sequence: Pre-Assessment; Informed Instructional Plans; Assessment & Analysis

A. Pre-Assessment: For the pre-assessment, I made a questionnaire on the Holocaust. The questionnaire had 12 total questions, which included fill-in-the-blank, matching, and one short answer. There were a variety of questions that touched on basic and specific material pertaining to the Holocaust.

B. Informed Instructional Plans

Content Focus and Learning Goals

As mentioned in Part I, the content focus covered in the instructional sequence was the Holocaust. The learning goals for the instructional sequence were as follows: (1) identify key factors that contributed to the Holocaust, (2) understand and explore discrimination of Jews and others during the Holocaust, (3) gain introductory historical background information and a sense of reality and

magnitude of the Holocaust, (4) argue a viewpoint based on conflicting evidence and information on a historical topic or figure. These goals are crucial because many of the students have little knowledge on the topic of the Holocaust, and they are not aware of how this event affected individuals and the world. I also have Jewish students in my classes, and although they knew of the Holocaust, some of them weren't familiar with the topic in-depth.

Detailed Instructional Sequence

(Students took the pre-assessment and did the KWL chart the previous week)

DAY 1: Web Quest in the computer lab-full class period

Day 2: Miep Giess Clip from Freedom Writers and started Survivor Activity (finished for homework)

Day 3: Hitler introduction and discussion. Students saw Hitler clip and read the informational text, and then wrote arguments

Day 4: Students presented arguments and then wrote Dear Hitler letters and presented them at the end of class

Day 5: Students took post-assessment

- Pre-Assessment: Students were given a pre-assessment in the form of a questionnaire. The assessment had twelve total questions, and it covered a broad amount of content relating to the Holocaust. Just from casual conversation I knew that many of my students didn't have a strong

- knowledge base for this content, so I didn't want to overwhelm them. So, I decided to include matching, fill-in-the-blank, and multiple-choice questions. Normally, the students are always given short answer assessments, but those assessments are on content that students are familiar with. Some of the questions that I included were: define the Holocaust; define genocide, various words that they would come across often in their novel, and a question pertaining to death camps.
- KWL Chart: At the start of the project, I had the three students in mind that I wanted to focus on, so I decided to add another quick informal pre-assessment piece to assess what prior knowledge, if any, they had on the Holocaust. Following the questionnaire I told the students that we were going to do a quick KWL chart. I opened the floor to volunteers, and two of the three students volunteered. I "randomly" called on the third student, but he declined and said he didn't know anything. So I probed and asked him if there was anything he wanted to know, and from there I got a response.
 - Holocaust Web Quest: Initially, I planned to use a traditional PowerPoint Presentation on the Holocaust accompanied with guided notes, but after tallying the scores of my Pre-Assessment and using prior knowledge of student response, I decided to let the students actively learn about the Holocaust content. The WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which all of the information the students work with comes from the web. The students received instruction and a handout with the links to the main site they would use to find the information to questions that were on the Pre

Assessment, but also questions that were crucial to understanding the main ideas of the Holocaust and Hitler. I let the students work in pairs to complete the WebQuest, and they were each responsible for one side of the two-sided handout. In the end, the students were going to teach their partners what they found on their quest. The second side of the handout had more difficult questions, and I strategically paired the students and told them which side they would be doing, based on their pre-assessment scores. All students were going to get the information by “teaching” each other, but I didn’t want a child searching for something that they already knew.

- Miep Gies Clip from Freedom Writers: After learning about what the Holocaust was and how it affected Jews and non-Jews, it was time for me to relate that historical information to the novel, The Diary of Anne Frank. The students were given an informational text on Miep Gies. Surprisingly, nobody in the class had ever heard of her. Miep Gies was the woman who helped hide Anne Frank and her family and friends for two years during the Holocaust. After the students read the text, we then watched the clip from the movie. The students got a chance to hear her say why she did what she did, as well as its importance. After this, the students engaged in a class discussion. I asked the students if they were in the same situation would they have risked their life to help hide Anne and her family, and asked them to explain why or why not. The exit pass for that day was for the students to argue their stance.
- Hitler Arguments: On the third day I thought it was time to introduce Hitler, and talk about him in-depth. I had purposely included two questions about

him on their WebQuest. I wanted to spend time as a class discussing Hitler. First, I gave the students an informational text on Hitler, which explained his early life, his leadership, and the ruthless killing of millions of people. Next, I showed the students a five-minute YouTube clip on Hitler. The clip had no talking, only upbeat music. The clip portrayed Hitler as a glorious leader, adored politician, and all around strong and revered individual. The clip and text were two contrasting viewpoints on Hitler, and it sparked a heated class discussion with the students. For the remainder of class the students were to write an argumentative essay on Hitler's character based on the clip and the text. This assignment was a crucial part of my project because it allowed me to let the students make their own assumptions and opinions on a man who was hated by many, but also loved by many.

- Holocaust Survivor Story Activity: On this day I taught the students about the concentration camp, Auschwitz. Auschwitz was the largest concentration camp, and also the one Anne Frank died in. This activity was a bridge for the students to use that knowledge and make it personal. The students worked individually in their groups of four and each received a different Holocaust survivor. After they read about the survivor, they were to create a Facebook page for their survivor on a sheet of blank construction paper. This activity allowed the students to relate what went on in the past to the present, because many of the survivors were the same age as the students when they entered the concentration camps.

- Dear Hitler: This was the culminating activity that the students completed before they took their post assessment. For this assignment I gave the students the writing prompt, which was simply, "Dear Hitler." Based on the arguments that the students did earlier in the week, I could tell that many of them had strong views on him as an individual. So I gave them another chance to express their views, but this time they were doing it from the perspective of Anne Frank. The students wrote these letters in class and in the end, we went around and shared out.
- Post- Assessment: The post-assessment was the same questionnaire that the students completed as a pre-assessment. This allowed me to see just how much the students actually learned and retained during the week

Featured Activities

The activities that I am featuring in this project for assessment are: (1) the pre-assessment questionnaire, (2) Hitler Arguments writing responses, (3) Dear Hitler Letters, and (4) the post-assessment. The short questionnaire that I used for my pre-assessment was a crucial piece because it allowed me to see what the students knew and did not know about the Holocaust. I didn't want to waste time teaching things that the students were already familiar with, so I used this to plan accordingly.

The Hitler Arguments allowed me to incorporate one of the overarching standards in this unit, which was R8.8: writing an argument. While teaching this Holocaust content, I wanted to make sure I was hitting the skill focuses that the unit encompassed as well. The skill that this assignment touched was, “how do you effectively analyze two conflicting arguments.” Had I just given my students the informational text on Hitler, or even just told them facts about Hitler, I would not have been doing my part as a teacher. It was my job to give the students the necessary information that they needed to formulate their own opinions and arguments on Hitler. There was no right or wrong answer for this assignment. I was extremely impressed with how far my students took this and the arguments they created.

The Dear Hitler letters were based on the skill focus of, “how can point of view affect argument.” Unlike the Hitler letters, I essentially gave the students their stance, and it was up to them to speak on it. The students were to write a letter to Hitler from Anne Frank’s point of view and in first person. By this point, the students knew who Anne Frank was, what the Holocaust was, and how it affected her life and the life of the ones she loved. The students thought critically about the events and issues that related to the Holocaust and Anne Frank and showcased their own opinions.

The post-assessment allowed me to measure the growth of each student. I assessed student improvement by comparing the scores of the pre-assessment with those of the post-assessment. The post-assessment proved whether students

listened during instruction, actively participated during the week, and engaged in the assignments.

The Holocaust is a vast and mature topic. As eighth graders, I felt that they were ready to take on this content and truly respond to it because many of them were excited about the novel, The Diary of Anne Frank, and were intrigued about the details of the Holocaust. This is definitely a unit that I would teach mid-year, after I got a chance to gauge my students' maturity level, and also allow them time to get comfortable speaking out in front of me and their peers. The most challenging part was crafting lessons that not only gave them the Social Studies content, but also hit on the skill focuses that aligned with eighth grade Language Arts. In order to not overwhelm the students, I was sure to take the major themes of the Holocaust and people/events, and broke it down for them in that way.

C. Assessments and Analysis of Student Work

Assessments

I analyzed the scores from the pre-assessments to determine the amount of prior knowledge students had obtained in previous courses on the Holocaust. I studied the scores and specifically the questions most students missed and got correct to see if there was anything that I needed to put more emphasis on. I noticed that a majority of the students didn't know about the concentration camps, the definition of the Holocaust, or really any of the key terms. I knew I had a lot of ground to cover, so I decided to narrow my focus to the main ideas of the Holocaust that I wanted students to know going into the novel about Anne Frank. I also really wanted to put a lot of emphasis on Hitler because he was the mastermind behind the Holocaust, and I wanted students to gain a holistic view of him. The Hitler arguments served as an informal assessment of the students' understanding of Hitler as a leader and a person. Student responses allowed me to see how well they could take information presented to them, and then formulate their own interpretations and opinions. The Dear Hitler Letters assignment was another informal assessment which allowed me to see how they felt and responded to the events that happened to Anne Frank during the Holocaust. Lastly, the post-assessment was handed out at the end of the week. The twelve questions were the same twelve questions that the students had on their pre-assessment. This allowed

the students to show me how much they learned about the Holocaust and how far they came from the beginning.

Overall Student Analysis

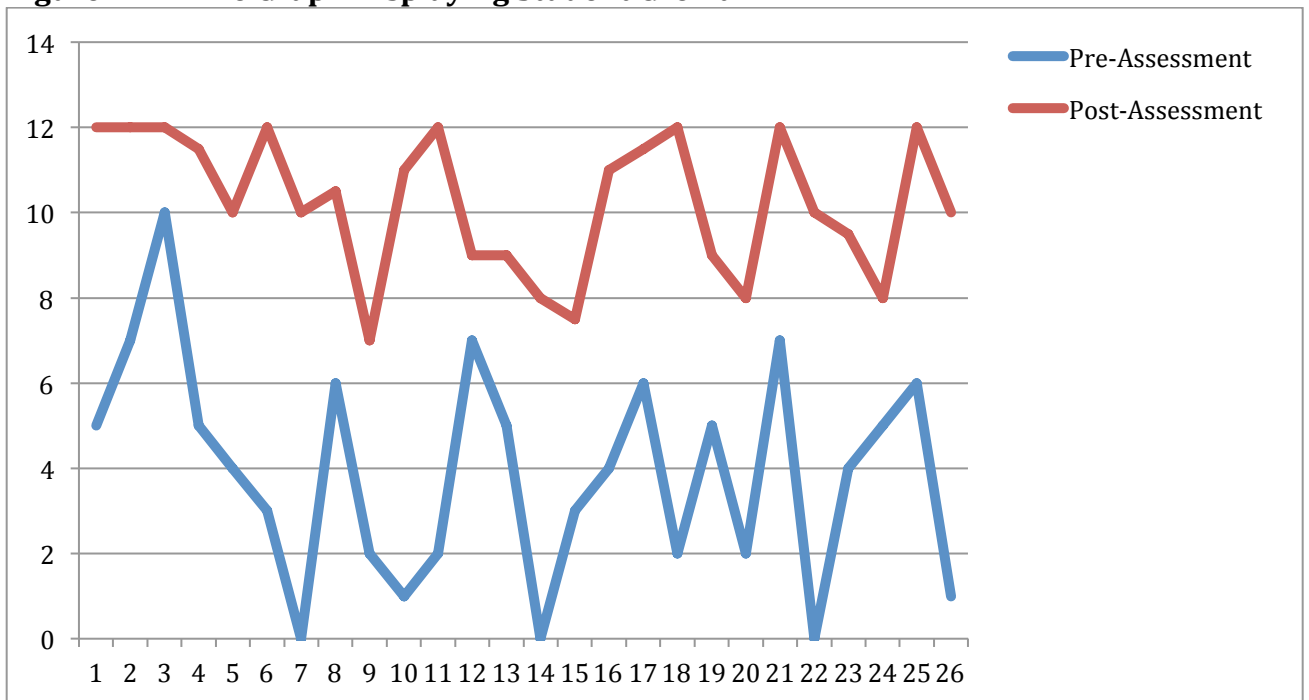
I was extremely impressed with the growth that I saw from the beginning of my instructional sequence to the end. Many of the students started out with little knowledge of the Holocaust and the impact that it had on not just Jewish people, but non-Jews as well. Eight out of twenty-six students scored a perfect score on their post assessment, and the majority of the students' scores increased significantly. Three out of twenty-six scored a 0 out of 12 on the pre-assessment, but all three of those students made an 80% or higher on the post-assessment. The amount of student growth that the students made is evident by looking at the chart and graph below.

Figure 2.1- Chart displaying student growth

Student Number	Pre-Assessment (Number correct out of 12)	Hitler Arguments	“Dear Hitler”	Post-Assessment (Number correct out of 12)
1 (Student A)	5	Check Plus	Check Plus	12
2 (Student B)	7	Check Plus	Check Plus	12
3 (Student C)	10	Check Plus	Check Plus	12
4	5	Check Plus	Check Plus	11.5
5	4	0	Check	10
6	3	Check	Check Plus	12
7	0	Check	Check Plus	10
8	6	0	Check Plus	10.5
9	2	Check Minus	0	7
10	1	Check Plus	Check Plus	11
11	2	Check	Check Plus	12
12	7	Check Plus	Check Plus	9
13	5	0	Check Plus	9
14	0	Check Plus	Check Plus	8
15	3	Check	Check Plus	7.5
16	4	Check Plus	Check Plus	11

17	6	Check Plus	Check Plus	11.5
18	2	Check Plus	Check Plus	12
19	5	Check Plus	Check Plus	9
20	2	0	Check Minus	8
21	7	Check	Check Plus	12
22	0	Check Plus	Check Plus	10
23	4	Check Plus	Check Plus	9.5
24	5	Check Plus	Check Plus	8
25	6	Check Plus	Check Plus	12
26	1	Check Plus	Check Plus	10

Figure 2.2 - Line Graph Displaying Student Growth



X Axis= Number of Students (26 students total) Y Axis= Number correct out of 12

Analysis of Student Growth

The three students I have selected to discuss in further detail will have a section in the end where their work will be displayed and analyzed. I gave each student a number and a pseudonym to identify them, rather than using their actual names. On the chart, they are the first three numbers and their letters and assessment scores are in bold. In my discussion, each student will be referred to as Student A, Student B, or Student C.

1. Student A (Nina)

I selected Nina to discuss in further detail because she normally performs well in Language Arts. Nina is one of four AG students in the class. She's classified as AG in math, and she is an all-around bright student. Normally, Nina is quiet in class so I have to explicitly call on her to get her to participate. She is shy, and often second-guesses herself. She is a hardworking student and tries her best on everything she does. One of my goals was to not only teach Nina the material, but also to get her to come out of her shell in the process. I wanted her to participate more and to become confident in her responses. On the Pre-assessment, Nina scored 5 out of 12.

Essentially, she made a 41%. I was slightly surprised at her score, but I knew that Nina is a fast learner and intrinsically motivated to do well. During the week, Nina worked diligently on her WebQuest, and her group was the first to finish. I knew that Nina was interested in the material because she would often ask me questions after class about more specific topics. Instead of simply giving her the answer, I

challenged her to find it and come back and tell me. Ultimately, and to her surprise, I had Nina tell the whole class what she had found. Nina's interest in the topic pushed me to work harder and tweak my instructional sequence to keep her fully engaged. Nina excelled in the argumentative essay and the point-of-view response. I was extremely shocked when she was the first one to raise her hand and present her writing to the class. From that point, I knew even without her post-assessment scores that I had positively impacted Nina. Nina finally came out of her shell in the end, and I was pleased. I learned that she wasn't actually shy, she just simply wasn't interested in the previous material, and had no desire to share out her responses. Also, she performs well with positive reinforcement. I normally go out of my way to give it to the struggling students and sometimes forgot about the others, but I made it a responsibility to give it to Nina, and every other child throughout the sequence. Nina received a perfect score on her post-assessment.

2. Student B (Akeem)

I chose Akeem to discuss in further detail because he is known as the class clown. He always has something funny to say to make his classmates laugh, and it is a hindrance because it deters them from paying attention. Akeem is also classified as ADD, which attributes to some of his excessive talking during instructional time or class work. Akeem is a bright student; he just sometimes chooses to do other things instead of paying attention. In his defense, if the work is not challenging enough, he will goof off and play around. On the pre-assessment, Akeem scored 7 out of 12.

That score didn't surprise me, because Akeem reads a lot outside of class and I know that he excels in his Social Studies class. Since Akeem knew a good amount about the Holocaust, I realized I had to push him farther, and create assignments that would allow him to show how far he could go with his knowledge.

During the WebQuest he wanted to search on sites that were not on the assignment sheet, so I had to monitor him and make sure he was staying on task. I knew that if he spent time on other sites before his work was done, he would miss crucial information that he would need throughout the week. I purposely put higher order questions on there and made sure that Akeem was doing the side that had those questions. Akeem is a sweet kid and responds well to one-on-one attention, so I used this to my advantage. During the week I would constantly go over to Akeem's desk and talk to him about what he was doing. I knew that the more I was talking to him or in his vicinity, the less he would get off task and lose focus. At times it was hard because I did have to make myself available to every student in the class, and Akeem is not the only one who needed one-on-one time. Akeem is usually always one of the first to volunteer to share his responses, whether I call on him or not. Akeem responded well to the point of view writing prompt. He made some great connections and really put himself in the time period. I had many outside conversations with Akeem and I even gave him the novel Night to read outside of class. I knew that I couldn't give the whole class an extra novel to read, but Night is a short read, and I knew Akeem would be up for it. Knowing that none of the other students were getting it made him feel special. Since Akeem is ADD and easily distracted, many of his teachers label him as a behavior problem, but I beg to differ.

Akeem is just a typical middle school boy with a lot of energy, and he is in the process of learning how to control that energy at the appropriate times. That by no means makes him “bad.”

Since Akeem is opinionated and likes to talk, I assumed that he would do well with the argumentative writing, and he did. Of course, he wanted to share it with the class, and I allowed him to do so. On the post-assessment , Akeem scored a 12 out of 12.

3. Student C (Jason)

I selected Jason to discuss in detail because he is, in my opinion, misunderstood. From the very first day I met him during my observations and pre-student teaching semester, he intrigued me. He often comes to class late and is disruptive. When he makes his way to his seat, he talks to those around him and does no work at all. I had a conversation with him one day and asked him why he doesn't like to work in class, and he told me that he's lazy. However, Jason is another one of the four AG students in my class. He is academically able to do the work and pass, but he chooses to keep a failing grade in Language Arts class. That really worried me. I could tell that there was a deeper issue going on with Jason; I just couldn't figure out what it was. Many of Jason's teachers accept his actions and just send him out of the classroom when he chooses to sit and do nothing. I was determined not to do that; I planned to take another route to get to him.

On the pre-assessment, Jason scored 10 out of 12. I wasn't shocked that he scored the highest out of the class; I was shocked that he actually did the

assessment. That made me extremely happy and gave me hope. By that time, Jason and I had a rapport, so he respected me and I feel like, although he would never admit it, he wanted to please me. One day after class I went up to Jason and said, "Look who decided to take their assessment and get the highest score in the class... but don't worry I won't tell anyone." Jason just laughed and shrugged it off, but I knew it made him feel good inside. From that day forward Jason did all of the activities in my instructional sequence; though he did get off task, he was still getting the work done. My Cooperating Teacher was surprised; she said that she has never seen Jason that into any assignment in Language Arts. He even came to class on time, and sometimes would stop by between classes to talk to me about the Holocaust. He said that he even got the Anne Frank novel from the library. Jason's Hitler argument was by far one of the best. He was the only student who took both sides and talked about the reasoning for both. I thought that was awesome, and Jason was finally stretching himself to where he could go. The thing that bothered me the most before this project was watching Jason waste his talent. Jason picks up information without even trying, and he took that for granted. On his post-assessment he received a perfect score. I put a smiley face on his assessment and after class the day he got his assessment back, he came back and said, "Ms. Waddell, ya' know...thanks for the sticker. My favorite teacher in elementary used to give me those all the time, and it brought back memories." I was extremely pleased by Jason's academic growth, of course, but also touched by his personal growth. I positively impacted not only his learning, but also his life, which by far exceeded all of my expectations.

Part 3- Teaching Impact Reflection

Reflecting back, the overall performance of the pre-assessment and post-assessment, as well as the activities in between, demonstrated the immense amount of growth that the students experienced. Only one student scored an 80% or better on the pre-assessment, and 17 out of 26 students scored an 80% or better on the post-assessment. Every single student who took the pre-assessment improved his or her score. This ultimately proved to me that I indeed had a positive impact on their learning.

The three students I selected to analyze were each very different from each other. I purposely selected those types of students because I wanted to test myself as a teacher. I wanted to see if I could teach the students who were normally stereotyped as “challenging” and I also wanted to see growth in a student who was a fast learner. After looking at the results of the data and just the overall growth that I observed, it is clear that I have passed the test. I can teach and I am able to teach, and see growth from a student’s starting point. I believe a huge part of this was due to the rapport that I have with my students. If a student respects you and feels as if you respect them and genuinely care about them, they will try their best to please you and do what is asked. Also, positive feedback is crucial. Many times students don’t hear positive feedback in classes, and it really is necessary. After seeing how much the students grew I knew that they were ready to take on the novel, The Diary of Anne Frank, because they had the foundation of the historical context.

The Holocaust is a topic that the students are going to learn in more detail during their Social Studies World War II unit, and then in more detail in high school. However, since they are reading the young adult novel The Diary of Anne Frank in Language Arts, I felt that if I didn't properly lay the foundation of historical context for them, then they wouldn't be able to effectively engage in the novel. If I were to teach the instructional sequence again, I probably would have added more free response sections to the pre-assessment to see what the students knew that wasn't on the assessment. Although I assessed them verbally by asking them questions, it would have been interesting to see if they would have put more or less effort on an assessment if they were under the impression that it was going to count towards a grade. Another thing that I questioned was the matching section. I ultimately went against my instincts and kept the matching questions on the assessment. Many of the students are extremely good test takers, and the process of elimination could have played a part in them getting a question right. I would definitely re-do the Hitler sequence, by showing the students both sides of Hitler and letting them argue their viewpoint. I think it is crucial to allow students to come up with their own assumptions and ideas. It is my job to give them factual information, but not to form their opinions. The WebQuest was a great way to get the students actively learning and it was a change from the traditional PowerPoint presentation. I wanted to start the instructional sequence with a WebQuest because I didn't want to associate rote learning and mundane note-taking with this topic. The performance of the three students clearly demonstrated that I am capable of having a positive impact on my students' learning. I proved that even if a student normally doesn't pay attention,

participate in class, or do their work that I still have a duty to teach them and make sure they grow.

The way you present topics to students has a huge impact on how they respond and perform. I would add more activities to the sequence, but I certainly wouldn't take away any of them. Also, incorporating the WebQuest was a great way to use one of the 21st Century Skill tools that I learned about last semester in Methods. I also used cooperative learning as a teaching strategy to improve my students' understanding of the Holocaust. They worked together in pairs during the WebQuest and also during discussions in class. Overall, the students were very perceptive throughout the instructional sequence because of the array of activities and techniques used to present and apply the information they were learning.