Data Integration Assignment

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Context is everything. No matter what area of study is involved, students benefit from understanding the circumstances surrounding their line of inquiry. Context helps to set the stage and provide valuable background information that can clarify the subject at hand. It also provides a means by which students can quickly integrate their previous knowledge with new concepts they are encountering.

One meaningful way educators can help to set context and help engage their students is by integrating data into their instruction. Because of the integrated nature of our real world experiences, virtually any subject area can connect to real world data. Even in my 8th grade English and language arts classroom, there are ample opportunities for this type of integration.

In this instance, students were beginning a unit of study on Edgar Allen Poe and his works. Because this is many students' first experience reading Poe's works, it is important to introduce some historical background, especially in terms of Poe's obsession with all things dark, disturbing, and deadly. Partly owing to these obsessions was the tuberculosis pandemic of the late 19th century. To discuss the disease, students were introduced to recent data from 2019 illustrating the current influence of the disease from the World Health Organization (linked here).

This data enhances the unit because it provides students with the opportunity to make a more personal, empathetic connection with the author and his works. Many students were shocked to learn that Tuberculosis is still a current health crisis, and many more commented that learning more about the disease helped them to understand Poe's motivation for his dark and

often depressing subject matter. Students also made real world connections to the world's current COVID-19 pandemic as well as the driving desire many people have for fear-inspiring horror content during the current Halloween season. This data also helps to set the stage for reading one of Poe's most iconic works, *The Masque of the Red Death*, in which all the characters at an initially jaunty masquerade ball gradually succumb to the terrifying disease.

By using this data, many kinds of standards can be addressed. Students are encouraged to analyze elements of literature in light of historical events, make inferences based on the text and their own background knowledge, and build vocabulary knowledge--both literal and figurative meanings--through the introduction of words such as "tuberculosis" and "consumption" among others. In addition to these ELA standards, this data can help build connections to math standards concerning statistics and data interpretation as well as social studies standards addressing the interpretation of primary sources, and even science standards addressing germ theory and infectious diseases.

In addition to opening up connections to these other standards and subject areas, data integration changes instruction and learning by helping to widen the scope of students' experiences and understanding. All areas of study exist within a rich context of overlapping ideas, historical factors, and potential forms of application. By building out the picture for students and encouraging their own lines of inquiry, we help them to understand ideas and concepts within a context while giving them the appropriate tools to extrapolate upon those same concepts themselves, developing brand new lines of inquiry. We can both deepen and broaden students' learning by taking advantage of opportunities to integrate meaningful data in this way.

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