Stuffed Animal Dissection Praxis

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Teachers should be aware of their student’s varying abilities in a classroom; this is something all teachers have been encouraged to practice. Teachers should also be aware of cultural and personal perspectives that may hinder or excel a student’s learning experience. The stuffed animal dissection tool was created with two potential lessons in mind: creating and connecting the stuffed animals organ systems, and/or dissecting the stuffed animal. With either lesson, the tool allows for students with cultural or personal beliefs about dissection to participate in an alternative route for learning about tissues, organs, and systems of living things. Beliefs aside, the tool can also be used as a dissection laboratory to reach students in a way that is different from lecturing, reading, and writing tasks. The tool is also different from the original dissection laboratory; it will give students more background knowledge of the organs when they create the tool.

Our text proclaims, “effective teachers differentiate instruction for a wide range of students” (Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz, 2014, pg.11). This idea was the first to inspire us to create a tool that allowed students to explore the Biology unit on Tissues, Organs, and Systems (Grade 11 and 12 College and University Preparation), from a perspective other than the usual specimen dissection laboratory. When students dissect, they began with an entire specimen and dissect and discover its parts. The process is delicate and can be overwhelming to students who may not understand what they are clearly looking for. The limited knowledge they have of the organ systems prior to the laboratory could cause their frustration. Our tool encourages students to work with a ‘blank’ specimen, and build its organ systems on their own to see the whole picture of how the specimen’s body functions. In this way, the tool reaches to students who may not be able to apply their knowledge by locating the organs; they can apply their knowledge by putting the organs together.

There are reasons why students may not be comfortable dissecting a specimen. Previously, such social or religious groups have been marginalized and unable to participate in a hands-on dissection without the use of specimens. The tool can be used as an alternative option to specimen dissection. If the tool can be pre-made, students can be given the same dissection laboratory and preform the dissection on the stuffed animal rather than the specimen. With this option, students who wish to refrain from dissecting animals can still participate alternatively. The tool is a “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Vacca et al, 2014, pg. 59) for those students who need it. The tool relieves any social, personal, or religious factors that students may need to consider when being asked to participate in their laboratory.

 To encourage multi-modality, the tool should be paired with an additional medium to guide the learning outcomes; for example, sticky notes or pins to label the organs, an activity sheet, and/or directions to follow. This will ensure that many students are engaged in the activity by a variety of modes. To achieve even more variety, the tool and activity sheets can be completed before, after or instead of an original dissection laboratory. Furthermore, the tool can be either built, or dissected, accomplishing depending on the desired learning goals. The adaptability of the tool to suit a student or a teacher’s needs is what makes the tool so valuable.

References

Vacca, R., Vacca, J., Mraz, M. (2014). *Content Area Reading: Literacy and learning*

*across the curriculum.* New Jersey: Pearson.