Survival of the Sweetest

By: Alicia Ericksen
I presented a fun lesson which I named “Survival of the Sweetest” to fourth grade special education children and got them excited about Math and Science in the process. With the approval of my professors I was able to combine this EMPACTS project for three classes.

Classes:
Math Reasoning               Mrs. Barbara Rademacher
Math Structures II           Mr. Joseph Timpe
Introduction to Education    Dr. AJ Shirey
Project Overview

• Present a Math and Science lesson to Special ed students incorporating the SmartBoard.

• Follow the Arkansas Frameworks to teach material relevant to 4th grade.
My Objectives

• To teach my first lesson to group of live students.

• To keep a resource group of children just as engaged as any group.

• To walk away from the lesson hearing the words “I love math.”
I collaborated with Mary Mae Jones Elementary School in the Bentonville School District.

I presented my lesson to a group of 6 fourth grade students in Mrs. Crotts math resource room. These students have been classified as remedial or behind in Math because of various learning disabilities.

I served my community by taking over for a day for Mrs. Crotts and presenting a lesson that I worked very hard on to teach her students. In the process I gained valuable classroom experience.
The Planning Stage

• First before I could waltz in and give a lesson to the students I needed to do a bit of research on their behavior so I would know what to expect and their level of understanding.
• I volunteered on 3 separate occasions in Mrs. Crotts class to observe the children and work with them one on one.
• I found that the students were just as excited and capable to learn as any student but their attention span was short. I knew I would need an exciting lesson to keep them engaged for a full hour. But keeping them engaged was not enough. I wanted them to learn and to be excited about what they had learned.
The Lesson Begins

• I began my lesson by sitting at a circular table with the students. I sat a closed box in front of them and told them that soon they will find out what is inside this box.

• I asked the students several questions about what is a predator and prey. We came up with a list of why a prey was more likely to survive in the wild. Small, bad taste, ugly looking, poisonous.
Then I opened the box. The students were so excited to see it was full of all different kinds of candy! The box was passed around while the students took turns picking out pieces of candy until over half the box was gone.

I told the students that they have become predators in Mrs. Crotts Candy Forest and asked them what that makes the candy.

I asked them why they chose the candy they chose. I got answers like: Chocolate, Big Piece, Tastes good.
Collecting Data

- Now it was time to collect data. I told the students that I had counted each piece of candy prey by type before they made their choice and now we are going to count what survived our predation. We recorded our data on data sheets that the students made. When we were finished we had a before and after column.
Making a Graph

- I then used the Smartboard to make a bar graph of the data from our data sheets. The students followed along and made their own graph on a piece of paper. I asked many questions for the students to give me direction on how to make the graph.
• We finished off our lesson by gobbling down our prey catch from our candy forest. While we ate we reviewed what a predator and prey is. We also talked about why making a graph of data is useful. Before the lesson started I asked a question… Who likes learning math? I got a lot of grumbles. I asked the question again at the end and I got a lot of excited “ME!” We talked about how math can actually be fun to learn.
Technology

- Smartboard
- Powerpoint
- Internet
Skills

• Using the SmartBoard for the first time
• Working with Special needs children
• Working with the school staff and teachers
• Time Management
• Creativity
• Delivering a lesson to students for the first time
Methodology

• Meeting with Mrs. Rademacher. I let her know that I wanted to give my lesson to a group of special needs math students. She gave me the idea to combine this with other classes since I had 5 EMPACTS this semester.
• Getting approval from Dr. Shirey and Mr. Timpe to combine this project into their classes.
• Brainstorming ideas to incorporate all three EMPACTS requirements into one.
• Meeting with Mrs. Crotts to pitch my idea
• Getting to know the students
• Researching the internet to look at similar ideas that have been used in classrooms.
• Pre-lesson arrangements: Buying candy, practicing my lesson, counting the candy, getting the camera ready.
• Delivering the lesson
• Making the final Powerpoint.
Project Results

• Delivering a fun lesson to students who previously thought of math as a boring and hard subject.

• Incorporating science in with math to make it more understandable with imagination.

• A lesson that puts students in the center of the action as participants instead of observers.
Although I did not work with a team on this project like I have done on other projects there was no lack of teamwork involved as I had to collaborate with several professors and school staff to get my project to go smoothly. I have a son who was diagnosed with Autism at the age of 5. This gave me inspiration to do my project with special needs students. When I tell people my son has Autism I can see in their eyes that they think he is mentally handicapped. I wanted to do this project to show that children with disabilities can exceed far beyond expectations if you tap their interest.

I have seen my son do amazing things with an uncanny motivation that exceeds far beyond brilliance out of his sheer interest and imagination. I even sometimes wonder if he is smarter than me. I wanted to show that these children can be a joy to teach not a difficulty. They are every bit as capable to learn as any individual, and I would argue even more capable in some cases. The key is opening their eyes and they will do the rest.
Acknowledgments

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