Helping Students Analyze Complex and Global Issues

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Introduction
Our educational system is often criticized for focusing both teaching and testing mainly on students’ lower order thinking skills, course by course, in isolation. It is said that, as a result, most students do not learn how to make connections between disciplines, analyze real world problems, synthesize complex issues, or propose and evaluate solutions to unexpected situations. To many, the solution to this problem is academic excellence, rigor, relevance, and effective instruction. But the question of how to do it still remains.

Purpose of the Poster
To present visually an innovative teaching process prepared for a university course to help students analyze, synthesize, and evaluate complex real-life issues from an interdisciplinary and global perspective.

Major Points and Information to be Shared
We will present graphically the process followed by participants in a college class to study a lesson on “Causes and Solutions to Hunger.” Together with the practical details about the process (including lesson plan, bibliography used, teaching tools and strategies, etc.), we will provide comments from the instructor regarding the reasoning behind each activity, as well as comments from the students regarding the usefulness of each step of the process.
Key phases of the process displayed in the poster include:
1. Interest approach and in-class preflection: At the end of an earlier class, students view a 5 minute video introducing the concept of worldwide hunger. Students are then asked to write down some possible solutions to hunger;
2. Content acquisition (knowledge and comprehension): Students review an on-line lesson (video, audio, text), read key articles on hunger, and take a quiz prior to class;
3. Motivation and application: At the end of the on-line lesson, students are given a “fun” application problem, and each student is sent a different “clue” (e.g., link, article, idea, etc.) to solve the problem. When coming to class, students are given 15 minutes to work in groups and solve the problem. Best group gets an “important” reward;
4. Linking between disciplines, breath/depth, and peer learning: Both in and out-of-class, students research and review literature and construct in groups a hunger problem tree (overall concept), including the extensive study of the cause/solution of their choice (specialization);
5. Synthesis, communication, and evaluation: All groups present and defend their tree to the rest of the class, and build together a “class problem tree;”
6. Analysis, evaluation, and application to real-life situations: In groups, students receive a case study (plus supporting documents), to discuss, analyze, research, and solve;
7. Final class discussion and reflection: After a class discussion on the case study, students compare the proposed solutions to hunger to their responses in the preflection stage, and respond individually (written assignment) to the final challenge question of the lesson.

**Educational Importance**

The poster provides several ideas, strategies, and tools for university instructors to use to enhance their teaching methods and help students further develop higher order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), apply their knowledge across disciplines and in real-world situations, and analyze complex and global issues.

**Keywords:** Teaching, higher-order-thinking, interdisciplinary, relevance, student-centered