Creating a Benchmark Lesson

A *benchmark lesson* is "a short lesson to introduce a concept . . . trigger awareness, inspire, and wow your students to want to learn more!" (Dr. Nancy Sulla). Teachers use these lessons to introduce concepts, and connect to the atmosphere of continual motivation (often through problem-based, project-based, place-based, pursuit-based, or profession-based learning). These lessons occur at key points, or *benchmarks*, within the unit. These lessons should be recorded and presented in such a way that students are able to view them at benchmark points. Lasting only 2 to 4 minutes, the intent of the *benchmark lesson* is not to teach a specific skill or give a lecture. Instead, the teacher should inspire students to seek out learning opportunities based on the content of the lesson. Later, teachers will hold discussion meetings with the whole class, usually split into smaller groups, in which they lead students to discuss, analyze, and synthesize what was presented.

Step 1
Refer back to your curriculum and standards for the unit you are planning. Identify a concept that is key to understanding the content of the unit. Keep the objective clear and focused. For complex concepts you may need to record multiple *benchmark lessons*.

Benchmark lesson concept:

Step 2
Begin the *benchmark lesson* by getting the brain engaged. Remember: Students are viewing *benchmark lessons* after being engaged in other activities and in preparation for new learning activities. Provide support in shifting focus from one activity to the target concept.

Reflection question/consideration:

Step 3
Once you have the students' attention, tell them the purpose of the lesson. State the objective in student-friendly terms. You may also want to share with students how the concept connects to the motivation for them (e.g., project, problem, place, pursuit, or profession).

Objective: Connection to *student motivation*:

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Step 4
Consider how you will record the content for your students. *Benchmark lessons* can be presented as a screencast slideshow, recorded demonstration, etc.

Presentation format:

Step 5
As you build the *benchmark lesson*, develop a logical presentation sequence. Include a number of clear points, with visuals, that support the concept. Repeat key points in various ways throughout the *benchmark lesson.* The repetition will increase students' awareness of key concepts.

Progression of key points and visuals: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Step 6
Draft a closing to the *benchmark lesson* in which you reiterate key points and the connection to a greater context, e.g., a problem or project.

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