Concept Formation Lesson on

CAPITALISM

Meghan O’Malley
EDUC 440 – Curriculum & Instructional Methods for Social Studies
**CONTEXT**

**Grade level and class:** This lesson is designed for a 10th grade World History class. The lesson could be taught during the unit on the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century or during the unit on the Cold War in the 20th century.

**Length:** 100 minutes (1 class period)

**Concept:** Capitalism

**Instructional Model:**
The instructional model used in this lesson is Concept Formation. According to Instructional Strategies for Middle and High School (Larson & Keiper, 2007), a concept is “an idea for organizing and classifying experiences and facts into groups with common qualities” (pg. 166). It is not enough for students to be able to recite definitions of concepts in a government, history, or geography class – therefore, the Concept Formation instructional model provides scaffolding for the students to formulate a tangible understanding of the concept. In this kind of lesson, the students work through the following steps:

- Examining several examples (either factual or hypothetical) of the concept
- Using a chart and several “focus questions” (Larson & Keiper, pg. 169) to record the important elements of each example
- Observing the differences between each example, which will help the students understand what characteristics/elements are not common traits and are therefore not essential for defining the concept.
- Determining the similarities between all of the examples.
- Identifying the “critical attributes” (Larson & Keiper, pg. 166) of the concept based on the elements/characteristics that all of the examples share. Define
- Defining the concept in their own words by synthesizing all of the critical attributes into one sentence.
- Determining what one word or phrase could be used to summarize their definitions.
- Using their knowledge of the concept and its attributes to classify examples as belonging to the concept or not.

Essentially, the Concept Formation instructional model helps the students to understand an abstract or complex concept by having them work “backwards” – instead of learning what the concept is, what the official definition is, what the definition means, and what are examples of the concept, the students work through this process in reverse. This ensures that the students not only know what a concept is, but they also comprehend how that concept is applied in the real world.

**Overview:**
The origins of capitalism are difficult to pinpoint exactly (because the basic element of buying and selling goods/services has co-existed with civilization), but with the decline of feudalism during the 13th century in Europe, capitalism began to emerge as a significant economic system in the West. The Crusades during the 11th-13th centuries and the exploration voyages during the 16th and 16th centuries both made trade an important element of society, due to the new lands and resources brought under European influence and control. During this time period, the focus of capitalism was commercial (i.e. based on exchange). The development of the European nation-state during this time also allowed capitalism to develop by ensuring a politically and economically stable context within which individual entrepreneurs could pursue their ventures.
Capitalism became increasingly mercantilist during the 15th-18th centuries, most significantly in England. Mercantile capitalism focused on the nation-states' ability to accumulate precious metal resources through trade, and to control the production and exchange process of goods. Industrial capitalism developed during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, which resulted in multiple societal changes including the birth of corporations, particularly in the United States. Instead of private individuals or the national government driving the capitalist economy, the focus shifted to these large businesses. Finally, capitalism in the 20th century faced challenge during the Great Depression as well as from other economic systems - particularly Marxism, socialism, and communism. (All background information taken from: ‘‘CAPITALISM,’’ History.com, http://www.history.com/encyclopedia.do?articleId=204628 (accessed Oct 17, 2009)).

Because of its evolution over time, its different manifestations among countries, and the fact that it does not necessarily indicate democracy, capitalism is a multi-faceted concept. The students will analyze examples of capitalism from several different time periods and geographic regions in order to deduce the critical attributes of capitalism. Then, the students will be required to write to classify several descriptions of economies around the world as examples or non-examples, in order to demonstrate their comprehension of this concept.

Rationale:
As the economic system used in the United States, as well as a dominant economic system around the world, capitalism is a vital concept for students to understand. Not only has it played a significant role in world and U.S. history, but it also affects their everyday lives. The Concept Formation instructional model is appropriate for teaching about capitalism because it provides a step-by-step scaffolding process for students to discover what elements must be present in order for capitalism to exist. Furthermore, it allows students to analyze real-world examples of capitalism and draw conclusions about how different countries in different time periods have operated/are operating under this same basic economic system. Finally, this instructional model gives the students the responsibility to think for themselves in order to engage the information given them by: extracting the most important points, comparing/contrasting, synthesizing, and drawing upon prior knowledge and/or new understanding to summarize.

OBJECTIVES

Academic objectives
• VA SOL objective #1. WHII.9 – The student will demonstrate knowledge of the effects of the Industrial Revolution during the nineteenth century by... b) explaining the emergence of capitalism as a dominant economic pattern, and the subsequent development of socialism and communism OR
• VA SOL objective #1. WHII.13 – The student will demonstrate knowledge of major events in the second half of the twentieth century by a) explaining key events of the Cold War, including the competition between the American and Soviet economic and political systems and the causes of the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.
• NCSS objective #1 – The student will analyze the role that supply and demand, prices, incentives, and profits play in determining what is produced and distributed in a competitive market system (VII – “Production, Distribution, & Consumption” (b) ).
• NCSS objective #2 – The student will compare basic economic systems according to how rules and procedures deal with demand, supply, prices, the role of government, banks, labor and labor unions, savings and investments, and capital (VII – “Production, Distribution, & Consumption” (g) )
Intellectual objectives

- Objective #1 – The student will be able to analyze examples of the concept in order to determine similarities and differences between them.
- Objective #2 – The student will be able to determine critical attributes of the concept from the similarities they observed.
- Objective #3 – The student will be able to synthesize the critical attributes into a written definition of the concept.
- Objective #4 – The student will be able to identify and describe the critical attributes of the concept “capitalism.”
- Objective #5 – The student will be able to apply their knowledge of the concept of “capitalism” by a) creating their own example that demonstrates the concept and b) finding and summarizing current examples of the concept in journalism sources.

ASSESSMENT

Informal Assessment

- Students will share their ideas about what the photos in the hook activity represent.
- Students will work in groups to compare their answers from the analysis of the concept examples – teacher will walk around the room and listen to students working together.
- “Data Gathering Chart”
- “Data Analysis” sheet
- Students will share the differences and similarities they observed from the examples with the rest of the class; other students will corroborate these differences and similarities if possible.
- Students will share their definitions of the concept.
- Students will synthesize their definitions of the concept into one main definition as a class.
- Students will share their labels for the concept with the rest of the class.
- Concept formation application activity.
- Students will complete the “Capitalism vs. Communism” video worksheet while watching the video – teacher will walk around the room and check that students are completing the worksheet.
- Students will volunteer to share their answers to the questions at the end of the “Capitalism vs. Communism” worksheet; the whole class will briefly review these questions and answers.

Formal Assessment

- “Capitalism in the News” homework assignment.

CONTENT & INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

I. The Concept Definition

A. Critical attributes of capitalism:
   1. It is an economic system.
   2. It is based on private ownership of property and/or businesses.
   3. It allows for competition between producers of goods/services, which determines price levels.
   4. It results in uneven distribution of wealth in society.
II. Hook
A. Word association with photos
   1. Have the following images on a powerpoint which I will show to the class:
      - 2 men in business suits
      - A farmer with cattle
      - An Indian market
      - 3 kids at a lemonade stand
      - A shopping mall
      - Times Square
   2. Tell the students to look at each of the images and write down the words/phrases that they associate with each one. They will have 2 minutes to write down these words/phrases.
   3. After 2 minutes, ask the students to raise their hands and share their word associations when I call on them (call on 3 or 4 students).
   4. After the students share, tell them that each of the images is related to the concept they will be learning about in the lesson.

III. Part 1: Analyzing Examples of the Concept
A. Pass out the “Data-Gathering Chart” and “Data Analysis” sheets to the students
B. Give the students the following instructions for part 1 of the assignment: Read through the examples and fill out the “Data-Gathering Chart” sheet
C. Give the students the time frame for how long they have to complete part 1

IV. Part 2: Defining and Labeling the Concept
A. Instruct the students to fill out the “Data Analysis” sheet
B. Give the students the time frame for how long they have to fill out the sheet
C. After the students have finished, go around the room and ask each pair of students to share one difference that they found between the examples. After each pair shares, ask the rest of the class if anyone else found that difference as well. Keep doing this until all differences have been noted.
D. Repeat this process with the similarities, but write each of the similarities in a list on the board.
E. Have each pair of students read out loud their definition of the concept. Write down the main points of each definition on the board.
F. Help the students synthesize their definitions into one definition of the concept.
G. Have the students raise their hands to share what they labeled the concept on their “Data Analysis” sheets. Write down all of the labels on the board.
H. Explain to the students that the official label for this concept is “capitalism.”

V. Part 3: Classifying the Concept
A. Give the following instructions to the students: Analyze descriptions of four countries’ economies and determine if they are examples or non-examples of the concept of “capitalism”
B. The students must circle “Example” or “Non-Example” under each description and then explain their answer
C. After the students have finished the assignment on their own, they should compare their answers with the person sitting next to them, and talk about any differences.

VI. Application of Concept and Homework Assignment Instructions
A. Explain to the students that the video they are about to watch teaches about the opposite of capitalism.
B. Pass out the “Capitalism vs. Communism” worksheet. Instruct the students to fill in the blanks on the worksheet while watching the video.
C. Watch the BrainPop video on “Communism”:
   http://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/economics/communism/
D. Instruct the students to answer the questions at the end of the worksheet.
E. After the students have answered the questions, ask for a few volunteers to share their answers; discuss questions and answers briefly as a class.
F. Pass out the “Capitalism in the News” homework assignment sheet. Briefly explain the homework assignment and tell the students that it is due 1 week from today.

RESOURCES
- Laptop
- Projector
- PowerPoint slide with word association photos
- “Data Gathering” charts
- “Data Analysis” sheets
- “Capitalism vs. Communism” worksheets
- “Capitalism in the News” homework assignment sheets
- Several newspapers and magazines for any students who do not have access to them at home (and do not have Internet access)

DIFFERENTIATION
- If necessary, I could pair advanced students with less-advanced students so that the less-advanced students are able to work with peers who are skilled at analyzing, comparing/contrasting, and summarizing information.
- The student-written example of the concept may be simple or in-depth, according to the students’ abilities – the only requirements are that the students fulfill the 5-sentence minimum length and include all four of the critical attributes.
- For the video on communism, the worksheet is fill-in-the-blank, so that the students do not have to be concerned with writing down too much information – instead, they will be able to focus more on the information presented in the video.
- For the “Capitalism in the News” homework assignment, the students have the freedom to choose where they find their articles and the complexity of the article content.
- I will provide several newspapers and magazines for any students who do not have access to these at home, and do not have Internet access at home.

ADAPTATION
- If I had students who needed additional time for reading according to IEPS or 504 plans, I would pair them with students who were faster readers and could the concept examples quietly out loud.
- If necessary, I would give students the “Capitalism vs. Communism” worksheets with the blanks already filled in with the correct information, so that they would be able to focus on watching/listening to the video.

REFLECTION
- Some students may need to be actively encouraged to stay on track in filling out their chart and analysis sheets, in order to finish on time with the rest of the class.
- The students will likely need help in synthesizing all of their definitions of the concept into one central definition – the teacher will have to actively engage several of the more advanced students in asking them to come up with a synthesis definition. This part of the lesson will likely be the most difficult to implement, and the teacher may have to synthesize the definitions on the board for the sake of time, and then ask for the students’ feedback.

PASS Standards Evaluation
1. **Higher Order Thinking**: The purpose of this lesson is for the students to be able to understand the tangible attributes of a concept, define the concept for themselves, and then use that definition and the attributes in analyzing other examples and non-examples of the concept. This kind of thinking – which extends beyond the students merely taking notes on a teacher’s explanation of a concept – seems to fulfill this PASS standard.

2. **Deep Knowledge**: This lesson seems to fulfill this PASS standard somewhat, because it does focus in-depth on a specific social studies topic, and contrasts it with another topic in social studies (communism). However, connections and relationships between the concept of capitalism and other social studies topics (i.e. government, history) are not really explored.

3. **Substantive Conversation**: I do not believe that this lesson fulfills this PASS standard, because the students are not engaged in any times of extended conversation with their peers or as a whole-class.

4. **Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom**: With the application activity (analyzing examples of four different countries’ economies) and the homework assignment, the students are provided with opportunities to learn about capitalism as it relates to the United States and the rest of the world.

5. **Ethical Valuing**: I do not believe that this lesson fulfills this PASS standard.

6. **Integration**: In learning about capitalism, the students are required to: read and analyze texts, engage in classification of examples and non-examples, and write summaries of articles that address the critical attributes they learned about during the lesson. Therefore, the students are having to use skills as they acquire new knowledge.