

My Narrative 2
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Theme Two: Content Knowledge and Instructional Practice (Standards 4-8)

“Candidates demonstrate the ability to thoughtfully describe, critically analyze, and insightfully reflect upon the use of content knowledge and assessment, planning, and instructional strategies to implement creative, rigorous, and engaging learning.”

Description: This section of the narrative covers a large bulk of the standards and looks at everything from what we teach, how we teach, how we do assessments, how we plan our instructional time, how we need to make changes on the spot, and the instructional strategies that we use in our classrooms with students. Furthermore, there are many different beliefs about teaching and how individual beliefs affect the pedagogy in a classroom. Jack Richards points out in his book, *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, “Teaching is a very personal activity, and it is not surprising that individual teachers bring to teaching very different beliefs and assumptions about what constitutes effective teaching.” (36) Also mentioned by the same author, “Within a program or school, teachers’ views on such things as lesson planning, the use of objectives, and assessment may lead to quite different classroom practices.” (38) And although different practices may be evident, there certainly is room for a common ground in all these different areas of the teaching practice.

After lesson plans are completed and plans are in place, I am often reminded that a big part of what I do as a teacher every day are the adjustments I make on the spot for all my students, depending on what their needs are and what needs to be learned or understood. Teachers create learning experiences that often need modifications along the way to meet individual student needs. Teachers also engage students in meaningful conversations, and apply context to real world problems. Teachers help students learn how to assess the own progress and help students to set measurable goals. Often we collaborate with others on how to best teach a certain concept or how to best support learners. At the end of the day I look back and at times are in awe of the different strategies used from class to class, or student to student in order to reach the outcomes in learning desired. This is the daily life of a teacher.

Standard 4: Content Knowledge and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

“The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) [they] teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful to learners to assure mastery of content.”

Introduction: Standard four is about knowing the content of what you teach. It is also about the methods teachers use to engage students and help them to understand and ask questions so that they can learn and master the content being taught. This is where teachers modify curriculum to meet student needs and looks for extra resources to make sure everyone has access and can learn.

Performance Criterion 4.1

“Candidates accurately communicate central concepts of the discipline.”

For my evidence I used 4.1a A Unit plan with 6 lessons to help my 6th grader understand concepts about getting around town. I wanted to stimulate prior knowledge since he studied in another country and even though his English was not developed yet, there were many ways to make prior knowledge connections. I had him draw a map of his previous town and label the places with the new vocabulary we were learning. He then described his current living arrangement and I introduced a Venn Diagram for him to fill out. As we progressed, I gave more challenging assignments, such as role play giving and receiving directions around town using imperatives. The last activity involved more thinking and reasoning as I had him design a future town, with the intentional purpose of stretching his learning to include being able to answer the reasons why he designed a town the way he did.

Performance Criterion 4.2

“Candidates accurately address common misconceptions of the discipline.”

I picked evidence from 4.2b which is an audio recording of a kindergarten student reading a book to showcase some common misconceptions of learning to watch for. She had memorized one of her favorite books and seemed as if she had read the pages, but in reality when I reconfirmed my suspicions, she couldn't actually read yet. One could easily mistake this student as being able to read, if they had overheard her, but she is still working on short phrases and has recently mastered tapping out beginning, middle, and ending sounds. I remember another adult coming in the room where we were working and said “Wow, way to go!” I just smiled and said, “thank you!” I later talked with her teacher to share the experience. Since then, she is coming along well and starting to read class level readings.

Standard 5: Application of Content for Transferable Skills

“The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.”

Introduction: In Standard five it is about creating projects for students to use their knowledge of critical thinking, use of creativity, and skills to engage in real life problems, both locally and globally. There is focus on communication skills for a variety of settings and different content areas. Teachers help learners to develop diverse social and cultural awareness, as well as use of different environments to help students venture out and explore the unknown.

Performance Criterion 5.1

“Candidates engage learners in applying perspectives from varied disciplines in authentic contexts (such as local and global issues.)”

This evidence used for 5.1a is my 12 – 15 minute video in teaching. I taught a 1st grade class in March of 2024 a short lesson on cultural diversity and understanding. I chose this class because I daily work with two ELL students in the classroom. We were able to look at cultural differences right here in Vermont, before reading to kids about some cultural differences we can embrace. I chose a neutral book on Japanese culture differences told through the eyes of two kids in Japan. We got to try a lot of the differences as I read to them and then welcomed those differences like flavorful toppings on a pizza instead of a pureed soup where you are not quite sure of what you are having. The importance was to encourage students to celebrate differences instead of trying to blend in like everyone else.

Performance Criterion 5.2

“Candidates integrate cross-disciplinary skills (such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving) to help learners demonstrate their learning in unique ways.”

The evidence selected in PC 5.2b was a “Sidewalk Chalk Town” that my high school students created during a 10 day intensive English program for Asian students planning to spend the year here in the states in various schools across America. This program was offered through University of Wisconsin. I taught at three summer programs before the Covid-19 Pandemic. In the photo I submitted, students had to create a town with names and streets and then lead students through the town blindfolded giving them directions, they had learned during our previous class of instruction. This was a fun and creative way that involved collaborative problem solving, as well as allowed the teens interact in a situation that mimicked a real life situations.

Standard 6: Assessment

“The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learning progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.”

Introduction: Standard six is about assessment. There are multiple ways to measure growth in students besides VTCAPS in Vermont or the WIDA ELL Screeners and Access testing done yearly to monitor progress. Teachers work independently and together to understand how students are meeting their objectives. Accommodations are made for learners with special needs

and language learners. Students are engaged in their assessments to help with goal setting and to teach the importance of taking ownership for learning. Teachers know about formative and summative assessments and know the importance of using both. They also know how to see gaps in learning and can alter lessons to meet the needs of their students. With positive feedback assessments can be a powerful tool to help students keep on track and reach their goals.

“Candidates plan and implement multiple methods of assessment over time and use the results to inform their instructional practice.”

For my evidence for PC 6.1a I used word recognition and pyramid sentences by Foundations to work with one of my younger students in 1st grade who was still falling behind in reading and often made the excuse that she couldn’t read. We worked hard this year with beginning, middle, and ending sounds, as well as tapping and still she struggled. One of the teachers mentioned using pyramid sentences to help her reading fluency and we started using different pyramid stories with vocabulary she could recognize. We also used a booklet that had her CVC words and trick words along with the practice sentences and within a few weeks there was noticeable improvement.

Performance Criterion 6.2

“Candidates analyze an individual student’s work products over time using multiple means of assessment, in order to adjust instruction for that student.”

The context for my evidence in PC 6.2a was “Student A” work samples over time. I looked at 5 writing examples of a 3rd grade student that I have worked with on a weekly basis this past year. He was struggling with punctuation, and I noticed in his writings he often didn’t know his capitalization rules. Over time I was able to make some formative assessments that he also needed work on regular and irregular verbs as well as some spelling issues. Over the course of the year and weekly observations I was able to adjust my teaching instruction to address some of these issues. His work keeps getting better and better as he incorporates what he is learning on a weekly basis.

Standard 7: Planning for Instruction

“The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.”

Introduction: In standard 7 it is all about the planning and revising. It looks at curriculums, goals, resources available, together with content standards that have to be addressed as one plans learning experiences to match what needs to be covered. It includes choosing the right materials for instruction, and the right strategies to use in teaching, along with the sequencing of activities and learning experiences, so that students can master the content area. Moreover, it involves long range and short range planning that will referenced time and time again as the teacher frequently looks at formative and summative assessment data along the way, with a good understanding of student prior knowledge and various interests, that affect student learning outcomes.

Performance Criterion 7.1

“Candidates plan instruction by drawing upon knowledge of content areas to meet rigorous learning goals.”

The evidence I used in PC 7.1a was the two text choices I made for an ELL student in 6th grade who was screened as an entry level 1 beginner student. The first book I chose was, “World English Intro,” by National Geographic Learning. The second book I chose was, “English for Workplace, Civics, and Academic Readiness,” by Steven J. Molinsky. Although the title of the second book may seem out of place, I picked it for the academic portion of the book, which I find helps true beginners quickly gain academic vocabulary and content knowledge needed for school learning across various subjects. Both books include many age appropriate visuals and descriptions needed for beginning students. The National Geographic Learning book engages students with interesting topics and cover listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Together both books provide balance to students overall language development.

Performance Criterion 7.2

“Candidates plan instruction by drawing upon knowledge of learners to meet rigorous learning goals.”

The evidence used in PC 7.2b was a slide presentation as well as card props I used on a lesson series I did on, “Understanding Prefixes and Suffixes.” This slide presentation I put together for a 10th grade student I had last year who was struggling with building vocabulary. Through previous knowledge of some prefixes and suffixes the goal was to increase her vocabulary knowledge and confidence in the usage of them. The presentation was used to engage prior knowledge as well as introduce new content. And the cards were a follow up activity that engaged the learner because it had a prefix or suffix on one side and the meaning on the other. Through the use of the cards we were also able to discuss strategies to help guess the meaning of some difficult ones, based on known vocabulary already.

Standard 8: Instructional Strategies

“The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.”

Introduction: In standard eight the focus is on instructional strategies that teachers use to encourage and support learners in the various ways of communication. For example, in the InTASC Model of Core Teaching Standards it mentions, “The teacher understands how multiple forms of communication (oral, written, nonverbal, digital, visual) convey ideas, foster self-expression, and build relationships.”

Performance Criterion 8.1

“Candidates use a variety of instructional strategies to make the discipline accessible for diverse learners.”

The evidence I used in PC 8.1a was the use of the (TPR) Total Physical Response method, developed by James Asher. Some students are audio learners, and some are visual learners, whereas some learners are kinesthetic learners, and learn best by doing something. I like to use the TPR method when I can to help engage as many different senses as possible in the learning activity. When I teach prepositions of place, I try to include an activity such as this so students can practice placing objects, in, on, under, next to, in front of, and behind. I always get good feedback on how helpful the activity is for students.

Performance Criterion 8.2

“Candidates use a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.”

The evidence I used in PC 8.2a was an inspiring story put out by TED Talks that was shared on Ted.com. I also included an article on the power of storytelling. The story was used to help motivate a student as they heard another student share their story. A true story can be a powerful can in turn be passed on through storytelling. Sometimes it is easier to remember lessons learned in a story than bullet points listed for rote memorization. This powerful tool and strategy has its time and place in the classroom.

Analysis:

Performance Criteria 4.2 addresses common learner misconceptions. 4(e) of the InTASC Model Core Standards says, “The teacher recognizes learner misconceptions in a discipline that interfere with learning.” There are various different types of misconceptions, but since one of my PC evidence centers around reading I will take a moment to look at a few misconceptions before looking at common ELL misconceptions. For example, in an article called, “Common Misconceptions about Reading Comprehension,” there are 4 common misconceptions mentioned. Common Misconception #2 Reading skills make readers more successful. Here the author mentions that most often it is the lack of reading strategies that impact a student’s understanding.

Research shows that it’s the strategies that make the difference in students’ abilities to comprehend than skills. When readers struggle, many teachers think that it is skills they need support in or help with, but in most cases- struggling readers need to have the reinforcement of strategies. Strategies will then support the students’ understanding of the skills.

Another misconception Ciera Harris mentioned in the same article was, “Lower readers have lower cognitive abilities than normal readers.” She mentions that it is not the cognitive abilities, but rather the connections students make that are lacking. Many times young readers have

different experiences and different exposures, so we need to see where there are some gaps. She goes on to say, "Schema is everything when it comes to reading comprehension. Without schema, which comes from life experiences, students can struggle immensely when reading." Working with primary ELL students I am seeing that it could be that their life experiences are different than others and could be part of the issue.

For one of my pieces of evidence I used an audio recording of a student reading a book to address misconceptions of literacy. In this case, the student had memorized the book by hearing it read so many times. In an article on learning strategies, there is a misconception that, "An ELL student who reads aloud well, understands everything." This is so important to note the author states, because decoding doesn't mean reading comprehension is happening.

In choosing to address PC 4.2a and PC 4.2b I also included for evidence an informative article on learner strategies for ELL's that addresses common misconceptions and misunderstandings multilingual learners face. One such myth is, "Teachers must know many other languages." I am constantly faced with this misconception, as if I need to know every language of every student I work with. "Perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions is that teachers must be ESL-focused or proficient in a student's native language to engage with ELLs." Multilingual learners also face misconceptions that they should only speak English at home, or that they shouldn't use their first language in the classroom, or if they are silent they don't know what is going on. Some strategies that teachers can use to counter the misconceptions and help students succeed are: promote classroom interaction, link ELL's background knowledge and culture, increase their comprehensible input, and focus on academic language and vocabulary. This is a start in the right direction in diminishing the negative impact that some of these misconceptions play in the classroom.

For standard five I chose PC 5.2b which is about using creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative problem solving. I submitted a picture from an activity "Sidewalk Chalk Town" I did with high school students at an intensive English summer camp program directed by The University of Wisconsin. In an article called, "Why is Creativity Important in Education?" written by, Kodely and posted on LinkedIn, he states, "Creative activities make learning more memorable and increase retention by connecting concepts to real-world applications." Moreover, "Creativity stimulates the brain and enhances learning in all areas, including reading, writing, and mathematics. It also helps to improve students' overall academic performance."

In this standard under 5(b) it says, "The teacher engages learners in applying content knowledge to real world problems." Part of the application of content in this standard is exploring ways to connect classroom lessons to real life situations, both locally and globally. Whether it is giving directions on how to get across town, through an international airport, or even across a school campus, connecting concepts taught in class need to be related to our ever changing world realities and help us to continue to navigate through them using critical skills taught in the classroom.

For standard six I chose PC 6.1a evidence to analyze. The evidence is an activity from Foundations on word recognition and fluency pyramid sentences. This task was for a 1st grade student that was struggling with reading over six months. I used word recognition and pyramid sentences to track her progress and do an ongoing assessment. CVC decodable sentence pyramids help students build fluency through repeated reading of words. Every line another word is added until the last one completes a sentence. By getting repeated exposure to words kids are able to read more fluently with each line, until they complete a full sentence.

With word recognition I took a list of the Foundations words for 1st graders and made and laminated words for my kids to work on. With some of the cards I used pyramid words, which basically added a letter to each line so students could tap the sounds. For example, the word “yes” would be Y for the first line, YE for the second line, and YES for the bottom line. I found that this also helped some of my young learners struggling with the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in a word. Foundations is also a curriculum that our district is using and anytime I can support the classroom teachers by overlapping what I do with the ELL kids that I work with, it reinforces what they are learning in their classrooms on a daily basis. This word recognition pyramid activity is actually a result of collaborating with teachers in my district and has been successful in helping struggling students as we continually assess their progress.

The performance criteria I chose to analyze was PC 7.1a “Text choices for a 6th grade ELL student.” Standard seven is about planning for instruction and part of that planning includes selecting resources and materials. With an understanding of the content standards and short and long range goals, and my work with ELL students, I need to find materials that will bring effective learning experiences to each and every learner, in order to help them meet their learning goals, one of which is mastering the English language in all content areas. In an article, “Factors You Should Consider In Choosing a Textbook,” Adedapo Adebayo mentions, “Textbooks should be interactive, contain lessons that inspire the interest of students, and actively engage their minds in the learning process.” The reason for choosing a “World English Intro” was that it is a National Geographic Learning book full of stories with amazing photos that engage learners in discussions that relate to real world issues with a wide variety of interests.

Another thing to consider when selecting textbooks is, “Good textbooks should reflect the aims, content, learning objective, and assessment of the curriculum.” In choosing my other text I chose to go with an academic readiness workbook that had lots of illustrations, pictures, vocabulary, and activities to prepare my entry level ELL student with the skills he needed to thrive in an academic school setting. It is called, “English for Workplace, Civics, and Academic Readiness” by Steven J. Molinsky. The content reflected vocabulary necessary to meet learning objectives and mainstream curriculums. I mainly chose the book for the section on academic readiness. The combination of the two texts together I believe would balance out the overall needs of the ELL students’ English language development for everyday life, as well as academic preparedness for upcoming challenges in his educational setting.

In P.C. 8.2a I used a Ted Talks inspirational talk as one of my pieces of evidence. Many cultures since the dawn of time have relied on oral narratives to pass on traditions, important truths, and learning to individuals in their community settings. In standard eight a teacher uses a variety of strategies to help learners develop their understanding. Vanessa Boris writes that Peg Neuhauser, “found that learning which stems from a well-told story is remembered more accurately, and for much longer, than learning from facts and figures.” In fact, according to psychologist Jerome Bruner, “we are 22 times more likely to remember information when it is presented in a story.” There are many other reasons why storytelling is a good strategy to use, as it has the power to change attitudes, and change lives. We should never underestimate the power it has to impact our students.

So the question is, “When is it appropriate to use stories in the classroom?” At teachhub.com Janelle Cox writes, “Telling a story is a great way to introduce a new topic. Think of it as an icebreaker. It can allow students to relate to a topic and get them interested in it before you even teach it.” Already, I find my mind wandering as I consider what will be the next story I will use in my classroom to introduce a new subject or topic of study. It is a tool I need to incorporate more and more into ELL teaching.

Reflection:

Even though I have been teaching for many years, this has been a good, but difficult process to go through. I have spent countless hours and it reminds me of how I felt after getting my M.A. degree. Just when you think you know something, you realize how much more there is to know. We are lifelong learners and there is always another book, another course, or another way of doing something new. I have thoroughly enjoyed collaborating with other teachers and bouncing ideas off of them this past year. I have found other teachers who have gone through the peer review process in our district, and they have helped me to focus on the tasks at hand. I find there is a wealth of experience and knowledge when we have time to share with one another. Too often we are so busy that it is hard to think about another workshop or training, but I know we have to be intentional and protect that time in our schedules or it slips away.

One take away for me, is the importance of continuing monthly meetings with other Multilingual Coordinators in the Burlington area and meetings offered through our state ELL leaders. It has been so helpful to share resources as well as to keep each other in check with what is coming down through the state or new programs. One such policy, is the importance for districts to have a Lau plan in place for our ELL programs. In our zoom meetings we have talked extensively as to what it should look like and now we have a template in place to help guide smaller and more rural districts. I would like to learn more about this, and I imagine it will take a committee of dedicated leaders and a good year to come up with a workable plan for our small ELL population that is continuing to grow. If there is a workshop or training available, this is something I would be interested in learning more about over the summer, before I meet with my supervisor to pitch this project for our district.

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