

Exemplary Instruction Commentary: Elementary Literacy

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1. Lessons shown in video

The lessons that are shown in the video clips are Lesson 1 (Clip 1) and Lesson 3 (Clip 2). I also have submitted a video clip displaying student voice of the Learning Targets, which is listed as Lesson 3, Clip 3. Clip 1, Lesson 1 runs for a length of 4 minutes and 42 seconds, Clip 2, Lesson 3 runs for a length of 8 minutes and 41 seconds, and Clip 3, Lesson 3 runs for a length of 2 minutes and 1 second. In Clip 1 the video begins during the last Informal Assessment of Lesson 1, after students have independently practiced brainstorming ideas for a character, setting, and problem. During Clip 1, the activities that can be seen include; students pair-sharing the ideas they created about a character, setting, and problem, monitoring of student progress as I talk with a group of students, two students verbally sharing their partner's brainstorm ideas, and explanation of the organizational plan sheet (Instructional Material 1.3). In Clip 2 the video starts at the beginning of the Instruction Inquiry Preview Review of Lesson 3 where I connect the prior knowledge gained from Lesson 1 to the content students will learn in Lesson 3. Through Clip 2 the activities that can be seen include; connection of Learning Target using example from the mentor text, students pair-sharing the terms *problem* and *solution* (academic language), building of their literacy connection using the mentor text, integrating prior learning from other writing units, and practice with composing an ending to their story. In Clip 3, the video displays a discussion to elicit student voice where three students discuss the purpose of the Learning Targets, why the Learning Targets are important, and what they can do to meet the Learning Targets.

2. Promoting a positive environment

I demonstrated mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to students with varied needs and backgrounds during several points of instruction. Marzano (2011) suggests that essential ingredients for instruction, to engage students in the learning process, involve encouraging physical movement during activities and adopting a positive demeanor. I incorporate these instructional methods into my teaching to increase the responsiveness of my students as they progress towards meeting the Learning Targets and Central Focus for the learning segment. In Clip 1 Lesson 1 I demonstrate mutual respect and rapport from 2:40 to 2:53 when I say "*I can tell (student) was really listening because he repeated all of the details that his partner came up with. That is great listening and partner work.*" This models respect for students, because I acknowledge positive interactions between peers that is an essential aspect of the learning environment in my classroom, as well as respond with nonverbal cues that communicates enthusiasm. At a later point in Clip 1 Lesson 1, I respond to students with varied needs at approximately 3:29 when I explain to students that their organizational plan sheet (Instructional Material 1.3) has a place to write the title for their story, but that is acceptable to not have a titled create yet. I support this comment when I say at 3:24, "*It's okay if right now you don't have a title of your story, because sometimes writers don't think of their title until their finished with their story.*" In the video clips I also challenge my students to engage in learning to deepen their understanding of the content taught throughout the learning segment. For example, in Clip 2 Lesson 3, at 1:00 I ask students to turn and talk with a partner on their line about what the term solution means, rather than simply telling students the definition. This particular activity validates my ability to provide opportunities where students can express varied perspectives of their learning. Prior to asking students to discussing the academic language, solution, I use our mentor text *Henry and Mudge and the Happy Cat*, to explain how the characters get into a problem, but there is always a solution. This demonstrates engaging students in learning with the use of physical movement, an instructional method supported by Marzano (2011) to increase energy level, and build upon their connection of reading and writing by using the mentor text. In addition to demonstrating rapport and respect for my students, I also provided a challenging learning environment to acknowledge the variety of learners in my classroom. For example, in Clip 3 I challenged my students' thinking at approximately 4:15 when I asked students to share what the author did to end the story (*Henry and Mudge and the Long Weekend*-Instructional Material 3.2). This particular question was challenging, because students had to locate direct evidence from

the text to support their thinking. Asking text-dependent questions is a valuable tool in literacy instruction to build a connection between reading and writing, and lead students towards independently applying skills. Throughout the learning segment, I also ensured to respond to individual students who needed additional support, as identified in their IEP and 504 plans, that involved preferential seating near the point of instruction and visual aids (such as the document camera). In both Clip 1 and Clip 2, use of the document camera can be seen to display instructional materials. This is a chosen instructional method to not only support learners with visual needs, but also to guarantee all of my students can access the resources used to enhance the literacy environment.

3. Engaging students in learning

Strategies that I used to elicit student expression of their understanding of the learning targets, and why they are important, can be seen in Clip 3 Lesson 3 where I have a discussion with three of my students. It is essential for all students to be able to express what the Learning Targets are and how they can meet them in order to ensure they can locate resources to help them succeed. During the student voice clip my main focus was to encourage students to articulate the learning targets in their own words, describe why they are important, and assess their performance and identify resources to help them progress. In Clip 3 Lesson 3 I address three main questions with my students that include; *What have our Learning Targets been for the last few days been?*, *Why are the Learning Targets important?*, and *What can you do to reach the goals?*. In response to the first question, *What have our Learning Targets been for the last few days?*, my students said at 00:08 “*Work on an ending.*” and at 00:29 “*To make a problem and make a solution.*” Both of these responses show student expression of the Learning Targets because they are skills identified in the Learning Targets from Lesson 1, 2, and 3, as well as the Central Focus, which is *Students practice sequence writing by creating a realistic fiction story that includes a pre-determined character, setting, a problem, and a solution to the problem.* Therefore, my students clearly interpreted the Learning Targets in their own way with the above responses to what the Learning Targets have been. In response to the second question, *Why are the Learning Targets important?*, one student responded at 00:41 “*It’s like a goal and it’s good to have a goal to be better at writing*”, which demonstrates the student’s understanding that the Learning Targets build on each other to help in writing a realistic fiction story. This response from my student displays their awareness that Learning Targets are important in progressing towards independently applying the requisite skills and essential literacy strategy. Lastly, in response to the third question, *What can you do to reach the goals (Learning Targets)?*, students communicated their individualized goals for their stories, which involved writing an ending with details to make it exciting. Based on the interaction with my three students in Clip 3, In Clip 2, I also show student voice when I ask to students to give a thumb up if they remember skills from a previous writing unit at 6:15, which serves as a formative assessment for recalling prior knowledge.

Developing literacy skills

The instructional practices that I used in the Learning Segment to engage students in developing an essential literacy strategy, *composition of text*, and requisite skills, *attributes of genre and organization*, can be witnessed in each of the video clips. Caram and Davis (2005) encourage teachers to promote active engagement in students by stimulating learning opportunities with the use of effective questioning that help students transfer new skills to more complex content. I model these instructional strategies at the beginning of Clip 1 Lesson 1, when students are engaged in practicing how to compose text as they pair-share ideas they created for a character, setting, and problem that they will use in their realistic fiction story. Displayed on the front board with a document camera is Instructional Material 1.2 that describes the steps for realistic fiction writing. The chart is displayed throughout the activity to provide a visual reminder to all students of the steps and support students in my class with IEP/504 Plans whom need visual cues during writing and reading instruction. From 00:00 to approximately 1:10 of Clip 1, students use the strategy telling a story across fingers, identified as step two of the realistic fiction writing steps, which can be seen by scanning those visible in the video. This form of instruction engages students in composing a text, working with attributes of the genre realistic fiction, and helps them to organize their ideas, which directly reflects the chosen essential literacy strategy and requisite skills I previously mentioned. The learning task of brainstorming ideas is used to deepen and extend my students’ understanding of composing a text that represents attributes of realistic fiction. In Clip 2 I again perform instructional practices that engage my students in developing skills that guide them in the progression of their academic learning. The first evidence of this during Clip 2 is at 3:31 when I say, “*We are going to notice what this author did at the end of the story*” (from *Henry and Mudge* mentor text). As students listen to me reading the end of the text *Henry and Mudge* and

the Long Weekend (Instructional Material 3.2) they are building upon a literacy connection between reading and writing, and examining how a real author of realistic fiction uses specific attributes in their writing. I also ask text based questions to elicit a literacy connection, encourage growth of the literacy strategy, and build student requisite skills, at 4:33 of Clip 2 when I say “*Can someone point out in these words right here (signaling to the text on the document camera) where did the author do that...where did they make the happy ending?*” To further encourage students in their acquisition of skills I prompt them to look at the picture, at 5:11 in Clip 2, to determine how images in text can inform readers about what is happening in a story. This strategy prompts students to link their prior academic learning, because they have to interpret why the author used a particular image to match the words of the text. In response to my prompt of looking at the picture a student responds saying the characters are smiling (at 5:15), which demonstrates this student’s ability to link their prior knowledge of what smiling means to the mentor text. I also connect this discussion to new learning by reminding students that writers can use a variety of strategies, such as showing feelings, to create an ending to their story.

Link to prior knowledge and assets

The instruction I used linked my students’ prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning, by deliberately framing activities and questions to promote student interest and development. I selected appropriate levels of questions based on my learner’s needs by incorporating various levels from Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) into each of the lesson activities from the learning segment. My students were familiar with the format of instruction that I used from previous writing units, which includes, but is not limited to; direct instruction, preview of content, connection to prior learning, practice activities, informal assessments, and closure assessment of student voice. The first evidence of how my instruction linked students’ prior academic learning is in Clip 1 at 1:23 when I ask students, “*Can I have someone share their partner’s ideas for a story?*” This question, which models Bloom’s level of student recollection of information, demonstrates students using prior academic learning with new learning, because they are practicing skills as effective listeners during peer work to express what ideas their partner had created for a character, setting, and problem. Students were exposed to the terms *character*, *setting*, and *problem* at the beginning of Lesson 1; therefore, they were encouraged to verbally explain how their partner formulated new learning to match the genre realistic fiction, a requisite skill listed for the learning segment. Another piece of evidence where I link student assets with new learning can be witnessed in Clip 2 Lesson 3 at 4:30. During this section of the video clip, I interact with my students to locate in the mentor text where the author used specific writing strategies to end the story. As I was receiving feedback from students, I adapted my instruction in the midst of teaching to differentiate the learning process and respect the needs of my students by asking text dependent questions to further build upon a literacy connection. For example, at 5:14 when a student says “*They’re smiling*” and I respond “*And when people smile are they usually happy?*” I am supporting student prior knowledge about nonverbal cues to determine how the author displayed feelings in the ending of the story. Lastly, in Clip 3 Lesson 3 I link my students’ personal assets as we discuss their personal goals towards meeting the Learning Targets at 1:08 when I ask students, “*What are each of you going to do to try to reach that goal?*” I am respectful to each of my students’ goals, which I acknowledge by providing nonverbal feedback as I nod my head, give eye contact, and revoice what they said, to communicate to students that I value their personal assets. Additionally, at 1:54 in Clip 3, I link their new learning of Learning Targets and personal assets as I mention, “*You all have a goal for yourself, we know what we’re going to do to reach that Learning Target.*”, which I later provide support and follow through, as students continue to work on their writing during independent time. One last method I use to link personal assets to learning is by facilitating opportunities for students to evaluate their own abilities in applying the skills and strategies discussed in the learning segment. I accomplish this during the student voice segment, Clip 3, by encouraging students to create an individualized goal for their writing and what steps they are going to take to accomplish those goals.

4. Deepen student learning

In Clip 1 and Clip 2 I elicited and built on student responses to promote thinking and apply the literacy strategy using requisite skills to compose text. Marzano (2011) explains that using a variety of questioning strategies, to increase the response rate of students, is key in engaging interest of more than one student at a time. A few strategies Marzano suggests involve; calling on students randomly, wait time, and paired responses, which are a few techniques I use to promote thinking and application of composing text. The first example of these techniques can be witnessed in Clip 1 at

00:10 when I ask a student, “*What is your character’s name?, “Where is the setting?”, and “What is the problem?”*. As the student responds, they are practicing the essential literacy strategy of composing a text, in this case realistic fiction, by using the requisite skill *organization* to formulate ideas for a story. I used knowledge of student assets when interacting with the student to use questioning that would benefit their personal development of the writing skills. As I am working directly with three students from 00:10 to 1:08, the remainder of students are working with a peer to organize their own ideas about a character, setting, and problem to reflect attributes of realistic fiction writing. This lesson activity is beneficial in extending my students’ understanding of how to create a story using attributes of realistic fiction. For example, students must think of a real life situation their character could participate in to classify it as realistic fiction. Prior the activity shown in Clip 1, students acquired learning about what classifies a story as realistic fiction to understand what they would be accomplishing during the second Informal Assessment of Lesson 1, which was shown in Clip 1. At 1:23 in Clip 1, I use Marzano’s (2011) questioning strategies wait time and calling on students randomly to elicit student response when I say, “*Can I have a volunteer to share their partner’s ideas for their story?*” This demonstrates me promoting students to think and apply the literacy strategy using the requisite skills organization and attributes of genre, because they have to accurately express what their partner shared with them during their discussion. In Clip 2 at 6:15, I connect a prior writing unit to realistic fiction writing by displaying an anchor chart explaining how to bring stories to life (Instructional Material 3.3). This point of instruction from Clip 2 is at the end of the Instruction Inquiry Preview Review from Lesson 3, where students are deepening an understanding of skills they can use to create an ending to their story, which is an essential component to composing text. At 6:44 I ask an extended question to promote thinking and application of the literacy strategy when I say, “*Why would we want to add talking...dialogue to make our writing better?*” To build upon the response from the student I also explain that dialogue can show how a character feels, like the author did from *Henry and Mudge*, which can be accomplished by using certain words and pictures. This connection also explicitly explains to students how they can apply writing strategies to their own writing. By continually making literacy connections throughout lesson activities, I encourage my students in critically thinking about how they can apply the literacy strategy and requisite skills to compose their own realistic fiction story.

Literacy strategy

I modeled the literacy strategy and supported students as they practiced and applied the literacy strategy in a meaning-based content in both Clip 1 and Clip 2. Ebeling (2000) categorizes techniques that can be used in the classroom to effectively adapt the learning of students, which include; varying the way instruction is delivered, offering a variety of outputs for demonstrating learning, and providing assistance in applying new content. In the video clips I show evidence of these techniques proposed by Ebeling in meaningful ways to support my students as they practice organizing ideas for a realistic fiction story. The first evidence is in Clip 1 at 1:43 when I ask for a student to share ideas their partner brainstormed for a character, setting, and problem. This activity is conducted in a meaning-based context, because students are practicing a variety of effective literacy skills that involve listening and accurately interpreting information, verbalizing a peer’s ideas, and representing attributes of realistic fiction. For this particular activity I could have asked students to share their own idea; however, I wanted to encourage students to practice retelling important details to assist in their understanding of composing a text. At 3:04 in Clip 1 I say to students, “*We just practiced coming up with these ideas right here on the carpet, so now you’re going to write your ideas down on your paper (Instructional Material 1.3) so that when you start writing on your writing packet, all your ideas are right here (signaling to the sheet displayed on the front board with a document camera).*” This example from my instruction shows how I supported my students as they applied the literacy strategy, because I connect the learning they had acquired during the lesson to what they will accomplish as they independently work at their desks. I also make a further connection to why the organizational plan sheet is helpful by explaining that they will use their ideas as they start writing their story in a packet, which includes 4 pages of paper. My students are familiar with writing stories across multiple pages from experience in prior writing units where they are encouraged to write stories that consist of at least three pages to model sequenced writing. In Clip 3 at 7:35 I model for students how to use specific attributes of writing to create a more detailed and descriptive ending to their story. I accomplish this by saying, “*I want you to think right now how you can use action...people moving, dialogue...making people talk, or feelings...remember feelings are things that happen on the inside.*” As I suggest each of these strategies for students to use, I gesture to the anchor chart (Instructional Material 3. 3) to provide students a meaning-based context. Visual cues and gestures are used on a repeated basis during instruction to support students in

my class that have visual assistance needs and to ensure all of my students make an authentic, deepened connection to new content.

5. Analysis of teaching

After completing the learning segment and reviewing my video clips there are changes I would make for the whole class, and students needing greater support and challenge, to better support student learning of the Central Focus. There were a handful of my students that benefited from the lesson activities, which I inferred based on monitoring students' progress and formative assessments during the learning segment. However, I recognized missed opportunities that arose during video Clip 1, Clip 2, and Clip 3 that I could alter to my instruction to support student learning. In Clip 1 I recognized a missed opportunity during mid-instruction, at approximately 2 minutes, where I could have made a brainstorm sheet displaying the different ideas created by students. I formulated this change based on monitoring student progress during the Closure Assessment of Student Voice from Lesson 1 where there were select students who struggled to recall their own ideas or remembering what classifies stories as realistic fiction. The collective group would have also benefitted from reviewing what identifies a story within the realistic fiction genre to ensure students were accurately applying skills to compose a text. There are two methods I could use in future instruction to address these changes. First, I would have gathered a small group of students, including those who are underperforming in literacy skills, to further extend their understanding of the requisite skills and literacy strategy to better support their learning. Second, I would prompt students at the beginning of Lesson 1 to discuss the attributes of realistic fiction writing with a peer, and as a whole class using the mentor text, to meaningfully deepen their knowledge and interaction with the central focus. A missed opportunity that I recognized in Clip 2, was at approximately 1:20 when I ask students to share what their partner had discussed about the academic language *problem* and *solution*. I prompted students to verbally explain what a problem and solution was; however, it would have deepened their understanding of these terms if I wrote them down and displayed them on a chart or poster. One method I could use to eliminate confusion about problems and solutions in subsequent lessons is to create a list of possible problems and solutions based on real life experiences. This activity would provide opportunities for students to express varied perspectives, link their academic learning, and incorporate their personal assets. Lastly, in Clip 3, the change I would make to my instruction was at the end of the clip when I reiterated the three students' goals for meeting the learning targets, but did not provide a written form of feedback. Although after Lesson 3 all of my students worked with a self-evaluation rubric to assess their own abilities of applying new content, I believe it would have been helpful to those three students to have a written reminder about what they were working towards. Reflecting upon instructional strategies is essential in effectively scaffolding students in my classroom who may require different learning strategies or support. After reviewing my instructional practices by analyzing the video clips, I was able to determine best practices that I can use to support my students in all aspects of their learning.

Changes for improvement

The changes that I described in the previous question would improve student learning in a variety of ways. It is fundamental to formatively assess my instructional methods during a lesson to determine if there needs to be immediate changes to effectively support student learning. Dewey (1933) viewed opportunities to reflect on experience as a necessary component of being a prepared educator, which I frequently adopt into my personal teaching practices. If I were to teach the Learning Segment again, I would enlist reflective strategies that Dewey (1933) describes as being active, persistent, and careful in consideration to support future experiences with my students. The first change I proposed, which was to spend additional time studying the genre of realistic fiction writing, would improve student learning by providing them with foundational knowledge to successfully interact with the central focus. As I examined students' work throughout the learning segment, I realized there was confusion about creating ideas for their stories that were realistic. Therefore, this anticipated change would be a valuable tool to use with my students. Once students developed a thorough understanding of the attributes in realistic fiction, I could continue in scaffolding them in composing a text, which was the essential literacy strategy for the learning segment. Bruner (1978) encouraged the use of scaffolding to promote a deeper level of learning, which can be accomplished by tailoring instruction to fit the needs of students and to ultimately guide them towards achieving their individual goals. The use of scaffolding is seen in the projected change that I discussed in prompt 5a, where I would work with a small group of students needing additional literacy support to provide them authentic and consequential experiences to progress their learning. This change would

model scaffolding, because I would work to transfer literacy strategies and requisite skills by encouraging their development and application of new content through the use of modeling and guided practice. Lastly, the final change to instruction that I described as an improvement for student learning was to delve deeper into a discussion about the academic language, *problem* and *solution*. While my students integrated appropriate uses of problems and solutions into their writing, a handful of students had difficulty integrating details into their writing that described the events. The central focus encompasses skills that aim to have students create a sequenced writing piece using details and correct order of events; therefore, allotting more time to discuss these academic terms would provide meaning-based context for my students. In conclusion, the key focus of change that I continually aspire to implement is maintaining a reflective mindset as an educator. A lack of reflection on instructional methods and strategies I use in the classroom will hinder my students from participating in a learning environment that extends their learning. Therefore, I will actively apply principles from research, as well as my knowledge of students, to effectively engage students in their development.