

Theme: *The Learner and Learning. Candidates demonstrate their ability to thoughtfully examine, critically analyze, and insightfully reflect upon their readiness to use an understanding of learning theory, learner development, and learner differences for the design of effective learning experiences in a variety of settings with diverse learners.*

Describe

_____The Vermont Licensure Portfolio is broken up into three parts each describing the various standards required to ensure competency in future educators. Part One of the portfolio has three standards and six performance criteria relating to the learner and learning in an effort to create an inclusive learning environment. Using learning theory, development theory, and diverse cultures and communities to adapt lessons to learners is crucial in becoming an educator. As a future educator, I understand the importance of adapting lessons to fit the needs of each student as each student has different strengths and learning preferences needed to succeed in the classroom. Catering to these various learning needs and multiple intelligences is what I hope to accomplish in my future English class. As each student has unique strengths, developing multiple ways to assess students in order to allow each person to demonstrate his or her learning is essential.

The first step to creating an inclusive and efficient learning environment for my students will include recognizing student development in areas such as: cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical. Performance Criterion 3.1 and 3.2 emphasize the importance of active engagement and collaborative learning in creating effective learning experiences. During my Literacy and Curriculum classes, I created a set of back-to-back mini-lessons designed to foster engagement, collaborative learning, and create a positive learning environment.

_____Effective learning experiences can only exist in positive environments which are built upon strong foundations. Creating a solid foundation requires extensive planning and preparation. When planning to build a new building, architects, construction workers, and others involved in the building process must each contribute to the process or the building will be unstable. Before the first floor is built, there must be a solid foundation. The foundation has to be able to hold the weight of the first floor and all subsequent floors. As the foundation for a building is concrete, the foundation for a classroom is the environment teachers and students co-create. A classroom, like a building, must have a solid foundation in which students are both respectful and respected, where they feel safe to interact with one another and provide differing

opinions. Inviting students to create a classroom culture and design the classroom norms will establish a solid, welcoming foundation. The foundation allows students to have effective learning experiences and encourages them to engage with the material.

During the fall of 2018, I had the opportunity to create a series of back-to-back mini-lessons based on a unit I designed in my ED-343 and ED-361 classes. I decided to form a unit based on William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* with a focus on persuasion, particularly how the negative effects of persuasion are highlighted throughout the text and ultimately in the media as well. This set of mini-lessons come from the beginning of my unit in order to set the context through which students will read the novel as the unit progresses. Students will be progressing toward a summative performance assessment in which they will have a choice: Students can either write (and perform) a persuasive speech from the perspective of one of the characters, or they can choose to extend the ending of the novel and write what they think would happen if the novel continued. Through the creation of this unit, particularly these lessons, I have collected evidence to fulfill PC 3.2 as I designed lessons centered around collaborative learning and social interaction.

Analyze

Collaborative learning is a crucial aspect of effective learning experiences as it allows students to partake in social interaction. This experience benefits students because this fosters engagement and has the potential to create a positive learning environment. Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and learning through social interaction support this PC and serves as a guiding framework for designing positive and inclusive learning environments. Vygotsky (1978) stresses the importance of social interaction as a way to enhance student learning. In practice, the Zone of Proximal Development allows students to tackle challenging topics through collaborative learning. This theory is best implemented through a gradual release of responsibility in which teachers scaffold student learning so students can eventually complete educational tasks independently. A gradual release of responsibility begins with teacher-led instruction leading into group work and eventually resulting in independent operation. Throughout this mini-lesson process I focused on the importance of group work and social interaction. Collaborative learning gives students the opportunity to experience advanced topics that they might otherwise not have been exposed to due to their inability to reach certain levels of knowledge without assistance. My [lesson plan](#) allows students to interact with each other in

partners and small groups to ensure collaborative learning. I scaffold student learning throughout the first mini-lesson so that students can create their own product, a skit, in the second lesson to demonstrate their learning.

The ability to ensure students are actively engaged rather than passively compliant is essential to creating the most effective and beneficial learning environment. A student can appear to be engaged, but can very well be struggling to meaningfully connect with the material. One way to combat the passivity that plagues students is to design lessons in such a way that allows students to bring their own personal experience into the conversation. Research by John Antonetti, author of *17,000 School Visits Can't Be Wrong: Strategies That Engage Students, Promote Active Learning, and Boost Achievement*, states that creating learning experiences that fulfill at least three of the requirements from [this list](#) will help ensure active learning (Schwartz 2016). John Almarode, associate professor at James Madison University and co-director of the school's Center for STEM Education and Outreach, compiled a list of eight ways to ensure active engagement in a classroom. Almarode asks eight questions designed to have educators reflect on their lesson plans in order to create effective learning experiences that will extend beyond the classroom and class assessments. He stresses the importance of making relevant and meaningful connections between the material and students' own personal lives and experiences. Rather than "teaching to the test" in which teachers will only discuss the information required to pass certain tests or essays, he emphasizes how the material learned in the classroom can be important outside of the classroom and how this is essential to student learning. I focused primarily on two of his questions: *Is there social interaction? Do students have an opportunity to talk about the learning and interact?* And *Is there a culture of emotional safety? Are mistakes valued because they are an opportunity to learn?* Using these questions to guide my teaching, I established a learning environment in which students had ample opportunity to collaborate through pair-shares, a whip around the room, and finally, creating and performing skits at the end of the second lessons.

Throughout these mini-lessons, I aimed to design impactful learning experiences through social collaboration and fostering positive relationships to ensure emotional safety. Stacey Goodman (2015) writes of the importance of teacher-student relationships within a classroom. As this is often something not explicitly implemented in curricula, it can be difficult to find a way to emphasize this connection. Goodman references Lev Vygotsky (1978) and the notion that "learning through relationships has its origins in the work of Lev Vygotsky, the child psychologist who asserted that learning is relational, and that language/conversation is central to the relational aspects of learning" (Goodman 2015).

This is a crucial component to positive learning experiences because learning is a conversation rather than a one-sided teacher-led lecture. My mini-lessons highlight how social collaboration deepens understanding as is evident by looking at the activities that occurred during my lessons.

Based on the students' article annotations, exit slips from both lessons, and the peer feedback forms, [this evidence](#) demonstrates my attainment of PC 3.2 in which I created a positive learning environment through social collaboration. When looking at the feedback forms my students provided after the lessons it is evident that I created a positive learning environment in which there were ample opportunities for active engagement and social collaboration. The forms are designed to provide detailed feedback on classroom instruction including the environment created, the purpose of learning, organization, and explicitly asks whether or not PCs were met throughout the lesson. I had the opportunity to ask my students to pay attention to PC 3.2 as I wanted to emphasize the importance of social collaboration and its impact on learning. In order to stress the importance of social collaboration, I thought that having students create skits that related to their own lives would both ensure active engagement as everyone was required to participate and it gave students the opportunity to interact with each other thus deepening their understanding of the material.

Throughout the process of designing, teaching, and revising these back-to-back mini-lessons, I have grown immensely in various aspects of my professional development. As an educator, being flexible is a crucial piece to having a successful classroom and creating effective learning opportunities. These lessons were designed to be taught in back-to-back lessons in which we would teach one day, then we would have a week to review feedback and adjust our second lessons to best attain the learning targets we communicated to students at the beginning of lesson one. Unfortunately, due to unexpected circumstances, I ended up teaching both lessons in one day. This definitely presented some obstacles as I was unable to review my peer feedback and exit cards prior to teaching my second lesson. Although I was frustrated at these circumstances, I was able to be flexible and adapt my lesson to not only teach it in the same day, but to alter my activities to accommodate more students. In my first lesson I had four students and I had designed both lessons centered around the fact that I would have four students. In my second lesson, however, I had six students. This initially presented a challenge, but I changed the group sizes and created two groups of three in order to create skits and present them to the class.

I demonstrated my success in attaining this standard as is evident based on the trends presented by the student feedback linked in my evidence. In addition to student feedback, I assessed student learning in the first lesson through an exit slip as a formative assessment. This insight into student learning allowed me to reflect on my teaching process. Based on their annotations of the articles and the exit slips in which I asked students to write one takeaway from the article and support it with one piece of evidence from the text, my lesson accomplished my objectives.

Reflection of Learning and Professional Development:

Throughout this process of designing, teaching, and reflecting on these lessons, the most rewarding experience occurred when the students got into their groups to create skits modeling a time in which peer pressure was used to convince someone to participate in an activity despite the negative consequences. This activity was designed to incorporate social interaction to foster active engagement. By making personal connections to their lives, students were able to build on the information we discussed in lesson one and make meaningful connections in lesson two. My experience of watching students create their skits was very rewarding because they were excited about the material and they wanted to participate. I was a little unsure of whether or not this would actually teach students the material, but in my exit cards it is evident they retained the material. I asked students to reflect on the persuasive techniques used in the skits and how people convinced someone to knowingly participate in a harmful activity. Although at this point in the unit we have not discussed specific persuasive techniques, this serves as a pre-assessment so students have a foundation for where we are headed in the unit. Using students' own experiences as a foundation will be important throughout the rest of the unit because I will be able to reference these skits over the course of the unit so they can continue to make these connections. In addition to their learning, this gave me an insight into the pressures my ninth-grade students are facing in their lives. Teaching is more than lecturing about material; it requires dedication to bettering students' lives as well. Now that I am aware of these pressures in their lives, I will be able to assist them in their personal and academic development.

In terms of my ongoing learning, I think that finding more ways to incorporate student experiences into the material will be crucial. Relevant and meaningful connections coupled with ample opportunities for social interaction is crucial to designing positive learning experiences because it highlights how the material can be used outside of the classroom. I also will strive to learn new ways to scaffold learning besides lectures and presentations because it will ensure student learning.

ED 361 Reflection

While teaching these two back-to-back mini-lessons, I learned the value of reviewing previous lessons especially when students may have been absent the previous day. Providing students with enough context so they are able to still engage with the material while also building on the content of the previous lesson is an important balance when designing effective learning experiences. Due to my circumstances, while teaching these lessons, I ended up teaching both lessons the same day but to two different groups of students. When teaching my second lesson, I had six students who were absent from my first lesson earlier in the day. This presented a few challenges while teaching.

At the end of my first lesson, students filled out an exit card highlighting one takeaway from an article we read during our time together. In addition to this takeaway, students supported their claims with one piece of evidence from the article. I had planned on using these exit slips to guide the beginning of Lesson Two, but I did not have time to review the slips before teaching my second lesson. If I did have time to review these exit cards, the group of six students present for the second lesson would still be behind because they did not read the article, thus they did not identify a takeaway or piece of evidence. I had to adapt my plan and summarize the article for these students, highlighting my own takeaway and evidence that I personally thought was important for students to retain from the text. Although this initially presented a challenge, I managed to provide students with enough context from the first lesson that they were then able to complete the learning opportunity, creating a skit, for the second lesson.

If I had the chance to review the exit slips from lesson one so I could adjust my plan for lesson two, I would have provided an example of an annotated article and an example of an exit slip in which one takeaway was highlighted with a piece of evidence from the article to support the claim. Based on some of the exit slips, there seems to have been some confusion on what evidence is and what exactly I was looking for. I did not provide any examples or models in my first lesson but both would have been beneficial to student learning. Again, if I had the chance to prepare the next lesson based on the feedback and exit slips from lesson one, I would have begun lesson two reviewing what a claim is, and what good evidence looks like. According to my standards, using evidence appropriately is an important skill. As ninth grade students, this will be the foundation for argumentative writing. In addition to being a transferable skill, using evidence is also the foundation for persuasive techniques which will be implemented at the end of the unit for the final performance assessment.

As I design the remaining lessons for my unit, I will make sure to incorporate enough review time to ensure all students are on the same page and are ready to progress with the lesson. In addition to providing more context, I will also provide examples and models so students have something to compare to when completing learning opportunities. Both the literacy and curriculum courses prepared me for the creation and teaching of these mini-lessons through the literature we have read throughout the semester in how to design effective learning experiences. As mentioned in the literature link, it is important to ensure that students are truly actively engaged. One way to do this is through social collaboration. This interaction is imperative as it allows students to build on their own learning and communicate to form new ideas.

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Description	The description employs insufficient details of the context and/or demonstrates misinterpretation of the Theme.	The description demonstrates the candidate's ability to recall the context and discuss the Theme.	The description demonstrates the candidate's ability to depict the context in which the evidence was collected and to illuminate the Theme^[BC1].
Comments: Score: _____			

Analysis of Performance Criterion 3.1: Candidate's design learning environments that support individual learning marked by active engagement.	The analysis demonstrates misunderstanding of how to use individualized learning for diverse learners. The analysis reveals unexplored suppositions about the Performance Criterion, uses insubstantial or inappropriate literature, notes irrelevant evidence, and/or overstates or does not state the candidate's effectiveness, reiterating conventional notions.	The analysis demonstrates the candidate's ability to select and apply learning opportunities for individual learners. The analysis reiterates the Performance Criterion, references related literature, program mission or conceptual framework, identifies evidence, and remarks on the candidate's effectiveness, providing basic description and commentary.	The analysis demonstrates the candidate's ability to design learning environments that support individual learning marked by active engagement. The analysis explicitly interprets the Performance Criterion, is grounded in appropriate literature, program mission or conceptual framework, is enhanced by salient evidence, and critically evaluates the candidate's effectiveness, while generating ideas, questions, or proposals.
Comments: Score: _____			

Analysis of Performance Criterion 3.2: Candidate s design learning environments that support collaborative learning marked by positive social interaction.	The analysis demonstrates misunderstanding of how to use collaborative learning for diverse learners. The analysis reveals unexplored suppositions about the Performance Criterion, uses insubstantial or inappropriate literature, notes irrelevant evidence, and/or overstates or does not state the candidate's effectiveness, reiterating conventional notions.	The analysis demonstrates the candidate's ability to select and apply collaborative-learning opportunities. The analysis reiterates the Performance Criterion, references related literature, program mission or conceptual framework, identifies evidence, and remarks on the candidate's effectiveness, providing basic description and commentary[BC2]	The analysis demonstrates the candidate's ability to design learning environments that support collaborative learning marked by positive social interaction. The analysis explicitly interprets the Performance Criterion, is grounded in appropriate literature, program mission or conceptual framework, is enhanced by salient evidence, and critically evaluates the candidate's effectiveness, while generating ideas, questions, or proposals.
Comments: Score: _____			

Self-Reflection	In relation to the Theme, the reflection demonstrates insufficient discussion of learning drawn from specific incidents and/or ideas for ongoing development.[BC3]	In relation to the Theme, the reflection demonstrates the candidate's ability to recount incidents, recognize personal beliefs, and identify actions for additional learning.	In relation to the Theme, the reflection demonstrates the candidate's ability to consider specific incidents, rethink long-standing personal perceptions, and conceptualize a vision for ongoing growth in this area.
Comments: Score:			

[BC1]Make sure you clarify the whole theme where suggested.

[BC2]It would have enhanced to use examples or quotes from your evidence to support your accomplishments.
You have great evidence. Also, make sure to self-evaluate by demonstrating what you did well in light of the PC and not so well and how you could improve.

[BC3]Make sure to bring this to a specific place. What will you do to learn more in this area?