

Capstone Reflection

Name of Preservice Teacher: Janell Uffelman

Name of Mentor Teacher: Anastassia McNulty

Email of Mentor Teacher: anastassia.mculty@cune.edu

Dates of Capstone: 11/21/11-11/23/11 Grade(s) Taught: Level II

Location: Lincoln High School-Lincoln, NE

Subjects Taught: ELL/ESL

Brief Summary

My Capstone Experience took place at Lincoln High School, which is probably the most diverse educational setting within the city of Lincoln. I had the opportunity to work with Mrs. Anastassia McNulty, who has been employed there for the past 7 years. She is an ELL/ESL instructor and this year, her classes are composed of Level II & III students (this ranges from ages 15-21 depending upon the acquisition and fluency of one's English language skills).

As a visiting teacher within her classroom, she placed me in charge of her Level II classes, which fulfilled 3 of her 5 preps. My task was to create a three-day unit that related to Thanksgiving and which would incorporate the speaking, reading, listening, and writing skills of the three Level II classes. Through various conversations, we solidified a plan together.

The students originated from multiple countries (Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Mexico, Columbia, Ethiopia, Iraq, etc.) and each had his/her specific language profile. One of the most important aspects of teaching ELL is to know the educational background of a student before he/she enters the United States. Knowledge of this can greatly influence the comprehensive skills of a student and how quickly he/she will advance to the next Level of ELL instruction. As a vital component of instruction, it was a challenge to create lesson plans and assessments for students whom I did not know as learners or as individuals.

Each of the three classes was composed of approximately 10-15 students. The majority of them were from an Asian country; but a healthy number of Hispanic students were also represented. Being ELL students, behavioral and social temperaments/norms are additional facets of instruction. Cultural differences are evident in mannerisms and social interactions. Working with them and learning from them truly showed me much about the teaching profession and this realm of education.

Analytical Reflection

Please reflect on the components listed below. Note strengths as well as modifications for the future.

1. *Hook*

By beginning with an introduction of myself to the class, the students seemed very interested in who I was (a stranger) and why I was there. My presentation gave them the opportunity to know me as a person and as a learner connecting me with them on a human level. I also feel that they viewed

Thanksgiving as a mystery. My “hook” related to connecting them with Thanksgiving and the meeting of the Native Americans and Settlers. I feel that it went rather well. Enthusiasm goes a long way. In the future, I would like to incorporate some aspect of realia that they could hold and see. Each day I tried to implement a different type of “hook” (technology, question, conversation, etc.). By having diversity in introductions, I feel that the students will remain engaged (for the most part) and that this will challenge me as an educator. I recognize that I need to work on finding more outside sources with which they are more familiar. As an ELL teacher, one needs to be cautious not to use forms of stereotypes or to continually implement a “hook” that depicts only one culture.

2. *Tapping into prior knowledge*

This was very difficult for me. As stated earlier, many ELLs come into a US school with a large range of different skill sets. Their prior knowledge and familiarity with certain English-focused concepts or ways of doing things is very diverse. However, I feel that the survey Dr. Uffelman suggested was very helpful. It provided me with an idea of where they were at as far as English comprehension and personal interests. I recognize that my survey needed revision as well. Some of the language posed was at a higher-level than they are able to comprehend. Avoiding academic jargon is necessary!

At the beginning of each lesson, I implemented a K-W-L chart and participated in a whole-group discussion about the Thanksgiving holiday. By posing purposeful questions that probed their prior knowledge, I feel that their feedback gave me a general understanding of what they knew and some of the misconceptions that existed. Conversing with my coop also assisted this process. She was very helpful in advising me about what they could and could not accomplish at their current level of linguistic development. For the future, I would like to implement more hands-on activities or simulations that allow them to work together while I assess and observe what they already know.

3. *Setting a purpose*

I tried to incorporate this into my introduction and “hook” each day of the unit. Was it successful? I guess that’s a bit difficult for me to affirm. I found it purposeful during preparation and presentation, yet the students are the judges of this task. There were moments when the students really seemed to cling onto and claim ownership of the content. They generally seemed interested in learning more about the history and holiday of Thanksgiving.

At the beginning of the unit, I provided them with questions that would show them how they can relate to the Thanksgiving holiday in the States and with the Native Americans/Settlers in history. These questions related to their personal interests, past experiences, and present situations. In response to their answers, I explained how they relate to the unit. My desire was for them to understand how they can share a connection with something/someone who seems very different than them.

My hope is to increase my efforts in setting a purposeful atmosphere. I know that I have a passion and purpose for the content, but not all of the

students will follow suit. By using each of their interests and finding a common connection between content and student, I want them to relate to the material. Again, using a variety of techniques may help me see what does and does not work with a certain group of personalities. My passion and enthusiasm are helpful, but I also need to present the lesson in a way that will engage them right away.

4. *Vocabulary strategy*

Vocabulary is vitally important for ELLs and all areas of instruction. My plan for vocabulary was to present the list of new words in a whole-class format accompanied by visuals. We then discussed the definitions and synonyms for each word. In addition to this, I also composed a matching activity and handed out a list of the words with definitions. Throughout the three days of instruction, I tried to use the words as much as possible and in a variety of contexts. They were also encouraged to implement the words in their presentations. Everyday we reviewed the words and I prepared additional visual aids for support.

Being such an influential part of instruction, there are many revisions that need to occur. I didn't have a list of the words (posted on a wall) for the students to look at and see. After noticing the need for this, I brought one for days 2 and 3. Giving them a sheet with definitions was not a good idea. Though some of them were able to use them, more visuals and synonyms need to be applied. I also should have created opportunities for them to see and work with the words in various sentence structures and formats. (Time is so valuable!) Dedicating time to making flashcards and filling them out together or in small groups would have been more beneficial for them as learners. I do realize that having more time and a longer stint of instruction would allow me to use and apply these words throughout our educational time together.

5. *Comprehension strategy*

One of my most exciting moments was using the Think-Aloud strategy on day 3. I dispersed a graphic organizer for them to record their thoughts and feelings, draw pictures, record new vocabulary, and answer questions that I prepared in advance. It seemed that we all had an enjoyable experience together and feel that this experience benefited them as learners and especially myself as a leader and first-time user of the Think-Aloud. In critique of this, I should have set aside more time for us to discuss and un-package the plethora of material that existed within the story and on the handout. After the Think-Aloud, I did collect their papers and gained insight about what they learned and thought, but wish that I had taken it to a small group discussion or whole class review.

The K-W-L chart was very helpful as well. They were able to see what they already brought to the classroom and each day they saw their gained knowledge and began to apply it in different ways. Asking purposeful and designed questions was also very beneficial for them and for myself. It was so exciting to see them think, ponder, and connect certain ideas that then turned into output and explanation. I was able to see what types of questions worked and in what order they should be presented. Presentation, wording, and

rewording questions can truly affect how students receive and comprehend them. I am very glad that I had my essential questions posted and was prepared with a PowerPoint slide of additional visuals and questions. I also had a graphic organizer about the differences between the Native Americans and Settlers that they could use as a matching activity.

One of the biggest lessons for me was to continually model everything to them. As ELLs, some of our educational expectations in the States have been implemented since Kindergarten; but many high school ELLs have different experiences and learning concepts. I need to model more often and use more physical actions that will solidify and symbolize comprehension.

6. *Methodology*

Goodness-this is a concept that I am continuing to work on and refine. I feel that this process will continue throughout my education and journey as a teacher. In order to receive a credible education, an educator needs to bestow knowledge and create opportunities for the learner to comprehend, work with, and eventually manage the content on an independent basis.

During the Capstone, I felt that the methodology behind my practice was purposeful and prosperous-but not perfect. The direct instruction method of a PowerPoint presentation accompanied by a handout for each student to utilize seemed to work well for this unit. Though I would never advise one (or myself) to overuse this method, it does serve a purpose and can function well.

Much of my plans related to class discussions, questions, and planned activities. I still see these methods of education as purposeful, useful, and beneficial; but there needs to be more diversity. Not all students demonstrate their knowledge through discussion, especially ELLs. I need to create a healthy balance in my methodology. I enjoy placing questions and situations for the students to discuss and respond to. However, I need to create different atmospheres (stations, small groups, pairs, etc.) for them to react to questions.

I also love to see students claim ownership of their education and work in groups. I did not provide them with sufficient time to accomplish this and learn from/support one another. I know that group work is vital and can bring much success to learners. Again, time was of the essence and I struggled to stretch the minutes of instruction. I need to hone-in on the vital components of each day's lesson and provide necessary support and additional materials when needed.

7. *Organization of lesson plans*

I am a very organized person and want to be well prepared for my students and classes. Each day was planned out and I continually reviewed my plans in order for the instructional process to run smoothly. I knew what I wanted to cover each day and how I was going to move from point A to B etc. Each day incorporated a few new aspects of the unit while still reviewing and applying the previously learned materials.

However, I experienced the need for change and revision in planning. On day 2, my lesson plan for my first class did not go as planned and I became very frustrated with myself. The lesson plan had positive points, but it was difficult to

actually administer. In addition to the fact that the class periods were cut down by 20 minutes, the order of instruction needed to be altered. I spent the next few free periods revising my lesson plans for periods 7 and 8-which were more successful and had a better fluidity to them. It's necessary to be flexible and willing to admit my mistakes as a planner and educator. Sometimes things don't go as planned and I need to revise my material and make it more comprehensible and applicable to the students

8. *Assessment*

For assessing my students, the unit project was an individual presentation. They were able to choose what type of presentation they wanted to do (two options were given) and I explained the requirements and expectations of the project. It was difficult to feel a certain level of authority in this area since my coop was not going to take my assessment into her records and assessments. I understand her thinking, but it created a purposeless feeling in me when I was assessing them.

I had a rubric for myself and modeled to them on how to give and respond to a presentation. Both were considered in my assessment of their presentation and I made them aware of that.

Throughout instruction, the main areas of assessment were observation, completion, and participation. There were multiple activities (completing worksheets, participating in discussions, remaining on-task during work time, working well in groups, etc.) that I observed and assessed. I would mark on their seating charts with a +/-/✓ indicating whether they received full points (✓), half of the points (+), or no points (-).

I recognize that I need to do a much better job on creating rubrics and specifically defining on what I am assessing and how. I did not have enough formal assessment because I felt that my thoughts didn't really influence their grade anyway; but I shouldn't allow that idea to dismiss the need to practice and refine my means and measures of assessment.

9. *Class management*

One of the most helpful and beneficial aspects of this experience was having students who were inquisitive, focused, and manageable. Though not every student fell into this category, a majority of them did and that was extremely helpful! There were definitely moments when my students became chatty, off-task, or disruptive; but I feel that I handled the situations well and in a very respectful, yet stern, manner. One consistent compliment that I have received from various instructors is that I hold a good foundation and relationship with the students. I very much appreciate their insight and affirmation-but there is always room to grow. There have been many classrooms where I've observed certain levels of disrespect between teacher and student. From these experiences, I've solidified the fact that this is not tolerable or helpful for the students/teacher. Guidelines and rules need to be created and honored. I feel that any issues that arose were quickly dismissed or addressed off the bat.

There were two certain cases when my coop had to intervene. The first one related to recent problems that a student had been creating. He only showed up for one of my classes and wasn't present the entire time. By observing this and the reaction of the students, I was reminded of the distraction and disruption that others can cause. Nevertheless, the teacher needs to have control and guide the students into a different focus. My coop handled this student's situation quickly by removing him from the room, which greatly assisted me in furthering my lesson plans with the students.

The second situation was....interesting. During the final period of day 3 (right before the students were dismissed for Thanksgiving break), one of my students was resistant to present his project. He was sitting right in front of me and the first time I asked him to present, he gave me a null response. I allowed him to wait until the end (though I saw that his work was obviously completed) due to the fact that I didn't want to interrupt the flow of the class and the focus of the students on their presentations. Things were going well and I decided to face any possible negative issue after the others had a chance to complete their assignments. This student decided to continue his path of resistance and gave me no response at all. I told him that he would stay after class with me.

By the time the class ended, the student, myself, and my coop had a 15-20 minute conversation about the situation. My coop greatly led the discussion, which helped me learn how to handle this type of attitude and personality. The two of us were able to debrief after his dismissal from the room and converse more about past experiences she had encountered.

Overall, I feel that the classroom management component went well. Any issues were addressed and handled appropriately. However, I do need to be mindful of the cultural differences. One student did "come on" to me-which I had been warned about-and that is one aspect of the US culture that I will need to handle carefully and seriously.

10. *Pacing*

Though I wouldn't say that pacing was a problem, timing definitely was an issue. When the students would get on a good track that related to deep discussion, I let them go and share their insights and questions with the entire class. I feel that this allows them to work and learn together as a whole while showing me what they are cognitively thinking and how they are processing the material.

I was very disappointed to discover that I couldn't implement all of the plans that I had for the class. There was so much that I wanted to accomplish and see them utilize. I've learned that one cannot teach everything in three days and other interruptions will hinder those plans as well. This is a weakness that I need to work on. By focusing on a few activities that are very purposeful and constructive, the students will have more time to be involved in authentic and genuine learning experiences. There exist so many plans and hopes in my mind that I was to disperse them all at the same time! I will need to work on slimming down my lesson plans so that I won't be disappointed when they are not completely fulfilled. This being said, it is my goal to have supportive and

purposeful back-up materials for the students in case extra time is allotted or an appropriate situation occurs within the classroom.

One great idea that I've seen on a lesson plan is timing an approximation for each activity. I think that this will help me keep the students and myself on task while measuring what is feasible in one period of instruction.

Holistic Reflection

What did you learn as a result of this experience? How has this experience impacted your perception of self as a teacher?

I learned that experience is the best and most direct teacher. Before going into this project, I felt completely immersed with helpful and useful material from many professors and previous observations. Though I was a bit nervous, my excitement overshadowed those nerves. I've realized that a positive attitude and enthusiasm can carry the students throughout the day and keep me energized as well.

Another valuable lesson that I learned was the need to continually refer to the objectives of the unit and to post those in a visible location in the room. This will help me stay on task as the instructor and the students remember the purpose of the lesson at hand. Objectives need to meet the level of the learners while challenging them to come to a higher order of thinking, processing, and reflection. Trying to accomplish too much in too little of time can lead to chaos and additional, unneeded stress in students and instructor.

A key component of instruction is the audience/recipients. It was very difficult for me to create lesson plans for a group of vibrant students whom I had not yet met. As a teacher, I firmly believe that instruction must be reflective of the learners and the teacher. With that, the relationship between students and between the teacher and class is significant as well. This relationship can be my enemy or advocate. I expect respect from my students as I will respect them and their individual thoughts and personalities.

As a teacher, I have recognized my current strengths and weaknesses. I need to focus on the major tasks at hand and on developing lesson plans that reflect and utilize the decided objectives. After this, I can then inject supportive elements, simulations, assessments, activities, etc. There exists so much room for me to grow and learn about my career as a teacher. It's possible that my strengths may become a weakness and vice versa. By recognizing and admitting my mistakes, I will better be able to assess my performance as a teacher, revise what needs to be done, and commit to that change. Each situation will differ from another and every day will bring its failures; yet I am confident that God will use my mistakes to better my performance and to glorify Him in what I do.