

Instruction Commentary Directions: Respond to the prompts below (**no more than 6 single-spaced pages, including prompts**) by typing your responses within the brackets following each prompt. Do not delete or alter the prompts; both the prompts and your responses are included in the total page count allowed. Refer to the evidence chart in the handbook to ensure that this document complies with all format specifications. Pages exceeding the maximum will not be scored.

1. Which lesson or lessons are shown in the video clips? Identify the lesson(s) by lesson plan number.

[Clip one captures lesson one. Specifically, this clip illustrates how I engage students as they inform the class regarding their analysis of their particular paragraph from the clergymen letter. Clip two captures the beginning of lesson four. While students are in the process of navigating which section of LBJ they want to independently explore, an authentic discussion emerges, surrounding their interpretation of MLK's argument in his letter.

2. Promoting a Positive Learning Environment

In response to the prompt, refer to scenes in the video clips where you provided a positive learning environment.

- How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to students with varied needs and backgrounds, **and** challenge students to engage in learning?

[Perhaps the truest way that I demonstrated mutual respect for the various students in our classroom was to validate and affirm their voices and contributions. As the beginning of the second clip shows, I had inadvertently said Brian's comment. Rather than simply move on, I felt it was important that I let Brian know that I did not intend to override his voice. I told him, "I am so sorry," and asked that he still share his comment. Later in clip two I affirmed both Dylan and Lucy's comments responding, "Astute comment!" and "Nice example from history!" respectively. In clip one I likewise affirmed students' comments/voices, especially when Marco pointed out that MLK's letter is only half of the phone conversation. I specifically made it a point to let him know that his analogy was precise and informative. Affirming students' voices is essential to establishing mutual respect for the various learners in our classroom, as it explicitly informs students that they are a valued and an essential aspect of the classroom community. Simply put, making it a habit to genuinely affirm students' voices encourages all students to identify themselves and each other as members of the classroom community.

I demonstrated rapport with students through intentionally inviting them into the conversation of their own learning. Because students investigated and became experts on specific paragraphs of the clergymen letter, it was important that I allowed students to choose how they wanted to guide their classmates through their analysis of their paragraph. I asked Drew and Ali, "How do we want to walk through this? Do you want to read it or do you want to let us know your concise thoughts?" Although this is a minor moment in the video, this intentional and authentic teacher move on my part informs students that we, as teacher and students, are journeying together into learning and through the learning task, and when students believe that they are "with" you (rather than "under" you or "over" you in the class) genuine rapport and relationship follows.

Just as I intentionally and specifically affirm and encourage students' contributions in the clips, I likewise create opportunities for students' voices to guide and deepen our learning. As a result, during the segment 2:07-3:11 in clip two, I intentionally do not attempt to interpret or expand upon students' comments. Rather, in the hope to allow space for students' voices and varied perspectives, I simply link students' comments together. This simple choice to let students' voices be the key contributions at select moments in my lesson establishes both respect for and responsiveness to students because it exists to position students at the core of

their learning, not the teacher. In fact, in both clips student's voices found their way onto the board/"Doc-cam". In clip one, Ali mentioned that the clergymen think MLK is "a bother." I immediately quoted her on the "Doc-cam" so that all students might be able to visually see and learn from Ali's comment. This small move of inscribing students' voices into the instruction implicitly informs students that learning is dynamic and responsive to their individual engagement.

More than any other strategy, I consistently utilize probing question in order to demonstrate responsiveness and challenge students to engage in learning. Especially in clip one, I incorporate probing questions into the fabric of the lesson. Questions such as: "When you say citizens who do you mean by citizens? How did you deal with this word, 'realistic'? How do you think MLK is feeling at this point in reading the [Clergymen] letter?" serve to point students back to the text in hopes to foster deeper and authentic learning. In each of the above cases, students leveraged my probing questions in order to investigate the text and work out their own learning in their minds, and then share that learning with the class.]

3. Engaging Students in Learning

Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.

- a. Explain how your instruction engaged students in constructing meaning, interpreting, and responding to a complex text.

[After the culmination of lesson three on Friday, students were asked to read paragraphs 13-24 of LBJ over the weekend. Because students were going to be asked to choose a specific section of 13-24 to rhetorically analyze and connect to their self-chosen topic, I felt that, if I hoped to engage students in interpreting MLK's arguments in these paragraphs, it was both necessary and appropriate to accurately and authentically position students' comprehension in regards to paragraphs 13-24. Thus, in class on Monday, I chose to briefly outline MLK's basic arguments in sections 13-24. I let them know that while I read over the weekend, I separated the paragraphs into sections. I also made sure that the salient themes and the sections were visible on the board so that each student could clearly articulate in their minds (and then on their own copy of LBJ) the salient themes in paragraphs 13-24. As is clear in the beginning segment of the clip two, I refer to the board when I position students in relation to paragraphs 17-18, because in order to engage students while I am positioning them in this section, it is important that they can look at the board while I talk and record precisely what paragraphs 17-18 are about without fear that they will miss information.

Because students were invested in our whole-class navigation, providing them with an overview of the salient themes of paragraphs 13-24 invited students to contribute their own experience/personal analysis of reading in a low risk environment. Consequently, students were engaged even more in their interpretation of LBJ. We see this play out in clip two. After I mention why MLK brings up Hitler in his letter, Lucy relates that she "also thinks it's pretty cool" that MLK brings up how "the Boston Tea Party is definitely an act of civil disobedience." Jacinto followed Lucy's comment with the fact that he thinks "it's pretty sketch that America uses the same tactics as the Holocaust." Ali then followed that up with how MLK uses Christian examples because he is in tune to his audience. And then Marco chimed in with the fact that "because [MLK] compares it to the Holocaust, [the Clergymen] cannot really argue" with him. By choosing to briefly outline each section in paragraphs 13-24, students felt free to contribute their ideas without fear that they would be wrong, and as a result, together as a class, we were able to interpret the core of MLK's arguments in paragraphs 13-24, as evidenced by our discussion about paragraphs 17-18.

Finally, especially in clip one, I utilize probing questions as a means to engage students in constructing meaning in relation to both LBJ and the clergymen letter. Questions such as: "When you say citizens who do you mean by citizens? How did you deal with this word,

‘realistic’? How do you think MLK is feeling at this point in reading the [Clergymen] letter?” serve to point students back to the text in hopes to foster deeper and authentic learning. In each of the above cases, students leveraged my probing questions in order to investigate the text and work out their own learning in their minds, and then share that learning with the class.]

- b. Describe how your instruction linked students’ prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning.

[The clergymen letter that students and I are analyzing together in clip one, is, itself, a link from their prior academic learning to new learning. Just before students and I began our edTPA unit, they gathered needed context in regards to race relations in the United States. Students also watched *Selma* as an entire 8th grade class. Thus, in our whole class analysis of the clergymen letter, students were able to weave the context they’ve learned into their exploration of the clergymen letter, and through it, students could critically analyze the letter. We see students’ prior academic learning being leveraged at the beginning of clip one. Just before the clip, because students had both seen *Selma* as well as built needed context, students were able to conclude that African Americans had no legal voice in the courts because they could not vote. Likewise, in the clip, as students shared with the whole class their interpretations of their specific paragraphs, they were empowered to leverage *Selma* in order to critically analyze the text. Jessica does this at the end of clip one. I heard a soft “I think...” and I am glad I pursued the source because Jessica let the class know that “by an outsider it means MLK because he wasn’t from [Birmingham].” Jessica’s comment revealed that the clergymen were politely telling MLK that he had no right to be in Birmingham. I did not need to routinely and overtly declare how their prior academic learning was finding its way into their analysis of the Clergymen Letter because they were inherently leveraging the context they have built in their critical analysis of their specific paragraphs. However, I do make sure to mention certain moments such as what happened in 1955 with *Emit Till* (end of clip one), a context-building lesson students experienced prior to this unit.

4. Deepening Student Learning during Instruction

Refer to examples from the clips in your explanations.

- a. Explain how you elicited and built on student responses to promote thinking and develop students’ abilities to construct meaning, interpret, and respond to a complex text.

[Groups of students were each given paragraphs from the Clergymen Letter that they became “experts” on. In our whole class exploration of the letter, when we arrived at each group’s paragraph, their group guided us through their interpretation of the clergymen’s words. The learning opportunity that I will focus on happened in paragraph two. In their interpretation of paragraph two, Ali and Drew interpreted that the clergymen recognize that “citizens have become more willing to try to deal with racial issues without involving the government.” Taking into account that the clergymen are not simply pointing out that citizens are taking matters into their own hands, but are criticizing these citizens for doing so, it was important that I invested class time to walk with Drew and Ali (the experts on paragraph two), in order to help all students realize that the clergymen are not happy about how MLK is advocating responsible citizens to stand up against racial injustices. In hopes to deepen all students’ interpretations of paragraph two in order to gain essential insight into why MLK responds the way he does in his own letter, I decide to start small. I zoom into the moment, asking Ali and Drew who they mean by citizens, as it is important to clarify that the clergymen are referring to protestors even though they say “responsible citizens.” Although Ali and Drew interpreted “responsible citizens” as “white people,” I do not tell them that they are “wrong.” Rather, I position them back into the text, and I re-read the sentence that talks about “responsible citizens.” By re-reading the sentence, we are able to articulate whom the clergymen mean by citizens. My strategy pays off. Immediately, Ali

suggests that the clergymen “may be talking about protesting,” and I leverage her comment and mention in a tiny Think-Aloud how I make sense of the “responsible citizens” rubbing up against “causing friction and unrest.” And because I sense that students are with me, I ask one final question: “What are the clergymen telling African Americans and protestors?”. My hope is that this allows Ali to explicitly state her interpretation of the Clergymen’s response in paragraph two. Through my in-depth navigation with Drew and Ali through paragraph two, their interpretation of the clergymen’s response went from “Citizens have become more willing to try to deal with racial issues without involving the government,” to the clergymen are telling MLK that the “protestors are a bother.” In short, through eliciting and building on Ali’s and Drew’s interpretation of paragraph two, together, we deepened every students’ interpretation. I recognize that the bulk of this example was explicitly with only Ali and Drew. However, because they were our “experts” on paragraph two, and because I was jotting our deepening interpretation on the “Doc-Cam”, I believe that the other students were learning with us as they actively observed and transcribed Ali’s and Drew’s interpretation of paragraph two onto their own copies. Throughout this lesson, I employed similar strategies with each group of students in their individual paragraphs.

Where I intentionally elicit responses from Drew and Ali in clip one so that all students might make meaning from the clergymen letter, in clip two I briefly summarize MLK’s argument in paragraphs 17-18 in order to create a basic foundation for students to build on and deepen my initial analysis. My choice to briefly position students within MLK’s argument in paragraphs 17-18, explicitly invites students to deepen each other’s critical analysis of MLK’s argument in these paragraphs. Marco leverages Jacinto’s “pretty sketch...” comment to reveal that MLK’s comparison to the Holocaust is a moral argument that is hard for the clergymen to argue this. I highlight both Jacinto’s and Marco’s statements in my follow-up comment. Ali similarly deepens and focuses Lucy’s point that MLK “knows his audience,” commenting that MLK specifically addresses the clergymen according to their particular religions. Overall, clip two conveys that I focus students’ analysis into LBJ in a way that creates space for them to deepen and make meaning from that analysis.

- b. Explain how you supported students in using textual references (or, if a film, visual references or dialogue) to check or justify their constructions of meaning and interpretations of complex text.

[Leveraging my use of the above example, I support students in using textual references through actually positioning students’ interpretations and thoughts within specific sentences from LBJ. Ali and Drew’s initial interpretation of their paragraph was not layered and accurate. Rather than simply tell the whole class how Ali and Drew should have interpreted their paragraph, I re-positioned them in the text so that we could craft a layered and accurate interpretation together. Specifically, I asked them questions that revealed who they meant by “citizens” and I encouraged them to clarify if the clergymen mean likewise. Further, in order to specifically support students in using textual references, rather than force Ali and Drew to find the right textual reference, I actually pointed them to and read aloud the specific sentence that reveals who the clergymen mean by “responsible citizens.” That way, the whole class was able to see me model how our interpretations must find themselves rooted in the text, all without doing the heavy lifting of unearthing what that interpretation is. Thus, once I supported the class by positioning them within a single sentence of the text, Ali and Drew were able to pull out whom the clergymen meant by “responsible citizens,” acquiring essential information needed to craft an accurate and layered text-based interpretation.

Further, in clip two, in our mini-discussion of MLK’s argument in paragraphs 13-24 of his letter, I literally summarized MLK’s basic argument in each section in order to encourage students to both be in tune to particular aspects of MLK’s letter, as well as to provide them the assurance that their thoughts/analysis are not wrong and to encourage them to specifically

weave textual references into their own interpretations and comments. Ali, Marco, and Lucy all do this in each of their comments.

Lastly, I illustrate that I likewise support students by highlighting when students attempt to utilize textual references in their responses. For instance, in clip two, Lucy expands on my mini-lecture about applications of unjust laws throughout history, mentioning that “the Boston Tea Party was an act of Civil Disobedience” (7:45 in clip two). Though Lucy vaguely alludes to the fact that MLK brings this up in his letter, it is not clear to the whole class (or to me), and so I specifically confirmed with Lucy that her comment is a textual reference, asking “He talks about that, doesn’t he?” (7:45). Lucy responds “Ya, that’s what he said” and then she continues with her comment (7:50). Though this represents a small moment, I support Lucy in her textual reference by assisting her in highlighting that her comment is based in the text. In regards to clip one, J weaves “unwise and untimely” into his group’s synthesis of their paragraph. Although it is not in the clip, we return back to J’s comment, but immediately afterwards I intentionally highlight J’s use of a textual reference in order to affirm his group’s interpretation.

5. Analyzing Teaching

Refer to examples from the clips in your responses to the prompts.

- a. What changes would you make to your instruction—for the whole class and/or for students who need greater support or challenge—to better support student learning of the central focus (e.g., missed opportunities)?

Consider the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/support (such as students with IEPs, English language learners, struggling readers, underperforming students or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted students).

[As I reflect on the effectiveness of my teaching and how my instruction empowered (or failed to empower) each student to grapple with and seek learning in relation to the central focus, two themes emerge: The role that students’ voices play in the learning of the central focus and the role that my voice plays (note: I would change multiple aspects of my teaching, but for the sake of depth, I will focus my changes purely on this theme). With that in mind, I will continue to focus on the changes I would make to my instruction from the example in clip one that I explored in question four. By creating intellectual space for students’ voices, these changes would more authentically empower each student to learn. Although authentic learning occurred in students’ (especially Ali’s) interpretations of the Clergymen Letter, and each student was able to be involved in that learning through recording each expert group’s interpretations on their own copies of the clergymen letter, my voice overpowers students’ voices. Again, there is no doubt that deepening of learning in relation to the central focus occurred (as evidenced in my answer to question four), but it remains likewise evident that my voice ushered in the essentials of that learning. Especially when Drew and Ali proposed that the clergymen were referring to “mostly white people,” I believe that I would fundamentally alter my instructional strategies at this point. In order to actively bring in voices from other groups, I would pause, ask groups to take thirty seconds to decide whom the clergymen mean by “responsible citizens” and to have their stance supported from the text. Once thirty seconds is up, immediately, we’d go around the room and groups would share whom they believe the clergymen meant by citizens and share their textual reference. If there are differences in each group’s stances, rather than personally guiding students to the “correct” interpretations, individual groups/students would have chances to voice *why* their interpretation is valid. It is important to note that I would leverage this instructional strategy for other questions that emerged in our exploration of the letter, such as

“who do the clergymen mean by outsiders? How is MLK feeling right now?” etc. This simple instructional change would structurally allow students to critically voice their meaning making and deepen each other’s learning.]

- b. Why do you think these changes would improve student learning? Support your explanation with evidence of student learning and principles from theory and/or research.

[The instructional change that I would make from clip one would improve student learning because it would create intellectual space for students to voice their perspectives in a way that would both empower students to own their learning as well as re-focus who has voice in the classroom. Though Ali does the heavy lifting of the learning for all students in clip one, my instruction did not create intellectual space for other students to aid Ali by voicing their interpretations. My voice served to bring students to a deeper level of interpretation (which sometimes is needed!), but because of this, I compromised the ability for my teaching voice to instead foster interactions among students so that they can own and evaluate their interpretations of the Clergymen Letter in relation to each other. In fact, in the two clips, my voice serves to summarize student comments, consequently overpowering their voices (I especially do this with the “outsiders” at the end of clip one). By restructuring my instructional techniques, I will be free to support students as they articulate their own learning. *Teaching Students to Read like Detectives* supports my proposed instructional change, “encouraging [that] inquiry as students discover and expand on information that is gleaned from ideas that are text based and peer shared” is an essential component of authentic learning (Fisher, Frey, Lapp 18). However, as I incorporate opportunities for intellectual space in my instruction (through letting groups take thirty seconds to determine who the clergymen mean by “responsible citizens” and the reporting out), it is important that I remain structured. This exact teaching technique stems from Corey Webel’s research on how to shift voice in the classroom from teachers to students. Webel suggests that structuring “the duration and timing of periods of cooperative learning can play an important role in establishing students as capable and confident problem solvers” (318). Though Webel is writing in regards to mathematical discourse, the theory equally applies to Language Arts classrooms. Student voice is student voice. Thus, through providing students with a structured amount of time (thirty seconds) to quickly identify who the clergymen are referring to, and then allowing each group to voice their stance, particular student voices from various groups (rather than my voice) will have the opportunity to deepen our interpretation of the clergymen letter. Further, considering that each group would not agree on who the clergymen are referring to, rather than using my voice to “to give explanations,” my voice would be used to “provide students with opportunities to compare, revise, and combine [interpretations]” (318). As a result, students’ voices would become valued and actively involved tools to deepening learning in relation to the central focus. Granted, this approach might utilize more class time, but by structuring student interactions with time constraints I will minimize the cost while likewise honoring each students’ voice as a tool for learning.

Fisher, Douglas, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp. *Teaching Students to Read like Detectives*. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2012. Print.

Webel, Corey. "Connecting Research to Teaching: Shifting Mathematical Authority from Teacher to Community." *Mathematics Teacher* 104.4 (2010): p. 314-318. Print.