

## 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Coming of Age Dialectical Journals

### **Date of Experience: Fall 2013 Semester**

### **Description of Experience:**

During my student teaching experience at Audubon Elementary I taught a Coming of Age Unit to a 7<sup>th</sup> grade class using the books *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton and *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel. For assessment and reflection purposes, I used dialectical journals throughout the unit for the students to write in and reflect on specific quotes within the book. They students would choose 3 quotes from the assigned chapters and write about them. In this reflection they would be asked to consider several questions such as what do you expect to happen next? Who are the main characters? What is the conflict? Etc. Over the course of the unit I was able to see their improvement in reflecting, their connection with the book and their understanding of the text.

### **Wisconsin Teacher Standard Alignment:**

This artifact aligns with Standard 8: Teachers know how to test for student progress. *The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner.*

There are a variety of ways to test for student progress as every teacher knows. For the Coming of Age Unit that I taught for 7<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts, I chose to use Dialectical Journals as a reading comprehension tool. I did not originally create these journals as an assessment, however, they ended up being my greatest assessment tool. I was able to see immediate progressions from reading to reading through each student's individual response to a story quote. No matter what level the student read at, progression was obvious.

Often times multiple choice tests and short answer assessments can be a false representation of what the student really understood from the story. Because these journals were reflection and opinion based, I was able to see exactly what the students remembered and were grasping from the story and what elements needed to be further addressed. Thus, this one assignment helped me to create so many others.

This was not a class favorite assignment and students seemed to complain slightly when we would do them. The interesting part to this for me came at the end of the unit when on their final exam, which was essay based, I asked them to reflect on what assignment helped them to understand the book the most. Unanimously, every single student said the dialectical journals. They said that they forced them to go back into the text and reread parts that they missed the first time. I think one of the best ways to test for student progress is to ask them what they know. Their thoughtful reflection is a better test for progress than a guess on any multiple choice test.

### **This artifact further aligns with:**

Standard 4- Teachers know how to teach.

Standard 7- Teachers are able to plan different kinds of lessons.

UW-Platteville School of Education Knowledge, Skill, Disposition Statement Alignment:

This experience aligns with KS3.c. *Engages Students in Learning*. The candidate has the ability to engage students in the learning process by linking appropriate content, based upon suitable instructional materials and resources, to students' knowledge and experience, being certain that all students are cognitively engaged in the activities/assignments and that the students actively contribute to the content design. Instruction is highly coherent and appropriately paced for all students and allows for reflection and closure as appropriate.

By using dialectical journals I was able to directly make a connection between the book the students were reading and their writing process. The journals were reflection based, so the students' grade was based strictly upon how deeply they chose to reflect. I provided weekly feedback on their journal entries and was able to see which students needed additional help in reading comprehension based on their reflections. I was able to see progression and improvement in reflective abilities, reading comprehension, and writing quality over the course of the unit through their journaling.

This activity could be consistent throughout any unit. It could also be used as an introduction to the class. The students also gave me positive feedback on their journals and how much they helped them to understand the books. I think it is always beneficial to ask for student input and in this case it made me choose to use them for a future unit as well.

Secondary Alignment: KS3.b. *Uses Questioning and Discussion Techniques*. The candidate's questioning techniques and instructional strategies are of uniformly high quality with special attention given to available time for student response, varied levels of questions, and adequate student involvement in the discussion/instructional process.

**Personal Reflection:**

What I learned about teaching/learning from this experience

I learned that sometimes the activities that students claim to dislike can often times be the ones that they get the most out of. On their final comprehensive written exam I asked them what class activity helped them to best understand the activity. The unanimous choice was dialectical journals, despite the overwhelming complaining that took place when they were assigned. The significance of using journaling in the classroom is huge. It gives the students ownership and forces them to go back in the text and think deeper about a specific event. Taking written exams

also seemed to be easier for them because they were used to the reflection process. I plan on using journaling in my future classes as much as possible for these reasons.

#### What I learned about myself as a prospective educator from this experience

I learned that as a teacher I need to emphasize reflection in all of my lessons. It causes you to go back and rethink a situation or make connections. As a teacher it is extremely important that I journal and reflect on my lessons and it is equally important that the students do so. So many times they will rush through a text and miss crucial points. I learned that I don't always have to make "fun" lessons. Sometimes lessons may seem boring, but if my students are gaining important knowledge and strengthening their thought process and reading comprehension then it is equally as beneficial if not more. As a young teacher I have a constant want to do fun, cool, unique lessons that the students immediately connect with and respond to, but journals showed me that it is important to incorporate differentiation in lessons.