Supporting Teacher Candidates with Standards Based Lesson Planning

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Abstract

Responding to the challenges that candidates face during the field experience and clinical teaching semesters in regards to lesson planning, instructional delivery, and personal reflection, the authors developed and utilized a framework for small group planning. The Explicit Learning Framework (ELF) provides a temporary scaffold to candidates and ensures that learners are receiving appropriate instruction that is aligned to standards. After several years of application and revision to the framework, it has proven to be a valuable tool for candidates as they move toward greater confidence and proficiency with planning for small group reading instruction.

Keywords: teacher preparation, lesson planning, standards based instruction

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The Explicit Learning Framework (ELF) is an instructional support tool to assist candidates with crafting and delivering standards-based lessons for small group reading instruction. During field experiences and clinical teaching, candidates typically deliver standards-based reading lessons within flexible whole group, small group, and one-on-one settings. The ELF is designed as a planning, teaching, and reflective framework to assist candidates in providing targeted, intentional instruction to learners needing contextual and language support within core instruction. The ELF enables candidates to plan reading lessons that allow emerging readers to manipulate text, understand textual supports, and become independent readers. The ELF is a tool to assist with the thinking process when planning for explicit and targeted small group reading instruction. In addition, the ELF supports candidates with planning and reflection through a continuous improvement cycle.

Candidates often struggle with knowing what appropriate support may look like for individual learners and when to allow a learner to engage in cognitive struggle with a concept. For some learners, this cognitive shift may take longer than others and the candidate may have to provide various means of support several times within one lesson. For other learners, candidates may have to keep the support in place over a series of days before pulling away the support. This back and forth continuum is a technique that has to be refined over time by candidates and is unique to each learner's needs per the standard being taught at any given time. The level and duration of support is often based on the complexity of the standard being taught, the text being used, and the task to be performed (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2009).

The ELF focuses candidates on one reading standard and spirals that standard throughout the framework to provide consistency and mastery of learning. During instruction, the sections of the framework are optional and flexible per the individual needs of a learner in the moment, but the standard does not change throughout the lesson. In addition to the redundancy of the spiraling standard, the candidate will fully script all sections of the ELF. This scripting allows university supervisors a window into the thought process behind the candidate's planning. When a candidate teaches a lesson and a

large majority of learners do not master the standard, the university supervisor can discern one of the following four factors about the candidate's level of understanding: (a) content knowledge of the standard, (b) the standard expectation, (c) the lesson planning process, or (d) instructional delivery methods. When a university supervisor is observing a candidate, the effectiveness of the instructional delivery should be the key focus, since the other three factors can be pre-assessed with the scripted ELF. It allows the university supervisor to predetermine when a candidate may need more assistance with understanding the meaning of standard content vocabulary, the level of rigor in the standard expectation, or how to maintain focus and intentionality on one standard throughout the entire lesson.

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) emphasizes the importance of candidates having knowledge of content and standards, as "…candidates develop a deep understanding of the critical concepts and principles of their discipline…" (Standard 1, 2013). Scripting the ELF takes a proactive approach to instructional delivery by pre-assessing a portion of the candidate's knowledge base prior to delivering instruction to readers. However, if a scripted ELF is solid in content knowledge about the standard, the standard expectation, and the lesson planning process, but readers still do not master the standard, instructional delivery may be the factor that needs to be addressed. This arduous task of scripting every single small group reading lesson would not be expected of classroom teachers, yet it is an excellent preparation and planning tool to clarify misunderstandings among candidates and to encourage them early on to be reflective practitioners (Brookfield, 2017).

Ideally, at the beginning of field experience, the classroom teacher, candidate, and university supervisor collaborate on evidence-based practices that are best for the group of learners with whom the candidate will work. The classroom teacher provides context and background regarding the students in the classroom. Then, the candidate uses the ELF to plan small group lessons in tandem with the classroom teacher to supplement and support the core reading instruction. Unfortunately, this scenario may not always be the norm. During field experiences, candidates may be given only 30 minutes of reading instruction time each day in which to teach prepared lessons. While most state standards require candidates to have experiences with a wide variety of diverse learners, many candidates are given only a small group of readers to work with over the course of an entire semester. In some cases, the candidate may be left to plan in isolation and to deliver instruction with minimal feedback and direction. Therefore, it is necessary that candidates have a deep knowledge regarding the standard content, understand the standard expectations, and know how to plan thoroughly and effectively with a cycle of reflection built into the framework for continuous improvement.

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Explicit Learning Framework (ELF)

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The ELF serves as a process guide for candidates. One ELF template provides added support with an in-depth explanation for each section (see Appendix A), and another ELF template leaves each section blank (see Appendix B). Both templates are intended for the candidate to type the entire lesson plan, addressing each expanding section. Based on needs identified from previous lessons and informal assessment, the candidate will craft the ELF around one reading standard for which explicit instruction, modeling, and practice for mastery is needed. The first three sections and the last section are shaded to indicate that they are not part of the lesson delivery. These sections of the ELF are for the candidate to set up and reflect on the lesson. The un-shaded middle sections are the lesson delivery sections.

Title of Book/Text and Genre

It is important for candidates to note the book title or text and genre to make sure the correct text types are chosen for the standard they are teaching. For instance, an English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) fifth grade Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) statement reads, "Students are expected to use multiple text features and graphics to gain an overview of the contents of text and to locate information" (§110.16[11][D]). The tagline for this ELAR standard specifies that this expectation should be taught and assessed in an informational text/expository text (§110.16[11]). University supervisors need to be aware of this cross check to evaluate whether the standard being taught in the ELF is aligned with the correct text and/or genre type. This provides a layer of accountability for candidates to ensure that an aligned curriculum is

being taught. It also should be an expectation of the university supervisor that the candidate has thoroughly read the book or text that is listed in this section so that instruction is relevant for both skill and context.

Standard

The ELF's structure centers around determining which standard meets the reading needs of the small group. This same standard will guide and spiral throughout the entire lesson plan and will align to the (a) book/text/genre section, (b) the stated purpose, (c) the as you're reading (AYR), (d) the follow up, and (d) the wrap up sections. Individual or collective learner needs, informal or formal assessments, teacher observations, anecdotal records, or school wide curriculum scope and sequences are all key considerations that may influence areas of needed growth when determining which standard the lesson will address.

Supplies

Since many candidates have to pull reading groups in tight places within the classroom to deliver targeted instruction, a dedicated supplies section on the ELF planning template proves beneficial and helps to ensure that instructional time is maximized. Any materials that might be utilized within a small reading group would need to be noted, such as white boards, dry erase markers, books, bookmarks, erasers, magnetic letters/tiles, data sheets, pencils, vocabulary cards, realia, media, and picture cards. Candidates are encouraged to use a multi-modal approach while teaching in order to accommodate a wide range of diversity such as English language learners (ELL), advanced readers, progressing readers, and unmotivated readers.

Focus

The focus is a way to center readers on the content and is used as an attention getter to quickly set the conditions and context for small group learning. This focus allows readers to shift their stance from whole group to small group reading instruction, and candidates should pose the question as soon as readers are sitting down for immediate engagement. It can be as simple as, "What do we know about fairytales?" to a more explicit question, such as, "What is a strategy we can use when reading does not make sense?". The candidate may elicit inquiry by displaying a picture or may have some sort of realia that prompts readers' questions. The focus can be content or standard driven and should take only a few seconds. The purpose is not to expound on a topic or allow for elaboration. It is a quick question (and possibly answer) focus. Some examples of how to frame a focus might be:

- Showing an image of a cowboy on the range and prompting, "Look at this picture and describe to me what you see".
- Asking readers to predict what the text will be about based upon a picture from the text.

The purpose is not to question readers and actually 'expect' an answer. It is to heighten curiosity and to activate immediately a motivation toward learning.

Stated Purpose

This section includes what the candidate tells the readers they will learn as a result of small group time. It is in student friendly terms. For example, "Today, we will compare and contrast Cinderella and Bubba, the Cowboy Prince, using a Venn diagram". The university supervisor needs to pay particular attention that this stated purpose matches the standard that is listed. This is evidence of alignment between the standard and the candidate's knowledge of the standard.

Word Instruction

Each small reading group lesson should include a small amount of time to explicitly pre-teach any needed vocabulary. There are two parts to this section. The first part is for vocabulary or specialized terms found in the text. Candidates should thoroughly read the chosen text and choose words that might prevent a learner from reading fluently and/or might hinder comprehension. This might be an unusual word, a lengthy word, a word that does not follow any typical

phonic pattern, or academic vocabulary that is specific to the content (Beck, 2013). No more than five words should be introduced in one lesson. If a text is lengthy, then two-three vocabulary words might be introduced each day. Candidates should choose a consistent way in which vocabulary will be introduced and taught, and the words should be taught in context in order to provide authenticity and transfer. Depending upon the stated purpose of the lesson, the definition of the vocabulary word might be given prior to reading, or it might be the goal of the lesson that the learners are to utilize the context to determine meanings. If a definition is given prior to reading, candidates should use a student friendly definition that would fit in the context of the text as opposed to a dictionary definition. This automaticity of word recognition will free up cognitive space for readers to focus on meaning rather than trying to determine unknown words. The candidate quickly states the pronunciation of each word. An example of candidate talk, with the proper noun underlined if there is one, might be:

- This is Cinderella. She is a princess that we are going to read about.
- This is Bubba. That is a nickname given to many men in the South. He is a cowboy that we are going to read about.
- This word is heritage. Heritage is the ways of life that is seen in the country we are going to learn about. You will see it many times in our text.
- This says Washington. It is one of our 50 states. If you come to this word and you forget what it says, just use the strategy of 'W' and keep reading. You will know it is a place. Since Washington was not necessary in understanding the meaning of the story, no emphasis was placed on having to know that exact word. This familiar strategy to use for proper nouns can be applied in all content areas.

Text Features/Format

Each lesson also needs to include time to recognizing various text features or text formatting exhibited in different types of text. This segment of the ELF is one that does not tie directly into the standard. The purpose of including this as a part of the framework is to allow readers to have recognition and familiarity with features or formatting that aid learners during the cognitive shift of responsibility from the candidate to the learner in order to promote reading independence. This is a quick, focused section that draws readers' attention to something unusual or distinctive about the text. It may be introducing a new feature each day of the same text or having one feature that is expounded upon during the course of the text study. It may be as simple as a discussion about how the formatting of the text is different from previous texts that have been read. Text features or formatting might involve teaching a feature for the first time or it might be a review of a feature previously seen. There are a myriad of features and formatting that can be pointed out: table of contents, index, italicized words, punctuation, use of quotation marks, illustrated versus photographed pictures, labeled pictures, bolded words, glossary, picture clues, narrative formats versus expository formats, underlined words, context on the spine of the book, repetitive text formats, and text boxes. Readers benefit from the added language support that is particular to certain types of texts as well as contextual support that make text comprehensible.

Preparing the Text

This part of the ELF consists of two parts. The first part, activating prior knowledge (PK) about text content, is the most important when initially introducing a new text. Navigating through readers' prior knowledge and determining the level of initial knowledge of a topic is critical in setting up the correct frame of mind for the brain to acquire new information. The second section, modeling the task that demonstrates learner mastery of the standard, is to provide a reference to the learner for what is expected during or after reading. If the candidate tells students they are to make a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting Cinderella and Bubba, the Cowboy Prince, then the candidate should quickly review a Venn diagram. "Today, after you are finished reading, you are going to compare and contrast Cinderella and Bubba, the Cowboy Prince using a Venn diagram. Who can show me how to make a Venn diagram here on my whiteboard? (reader makes two large overlapping circles on the whiteboard). How will we know where to put the comparisons and where to put the contrasts? Yes, we need to label both sides and the overlapping middle section (candidate labels one side with a 'C' for Cinderella and one side with a 'B' for Bubba to show the contrasts, and 'C&B' over the overlapping section for the comparisons)." The candidate then

leaves the whiteboard out as a visual model for the readers when they begin to construct their individual Venn diagrams after reading.

As You're Reading (AYR)

This is perhaps the most important part of what the candidate actually says to the readers. This section tells learners exactly what the purpose for reading will be. Although the candidate shared the stated purpose earlier, there have been several sections between it and actual reading. This allows learners to have a set purpose prior to opening and reading the text independently. Candidates should tell learners in one succinct sentence exactly why they are reading the material and what they will do with the new information either during or after they had read the text. An example of the AYR could be something as simple as, "As you're reading about Bubba, the Cowboy Prince, pay particular attention to characteristics that are in comparison or in contrast from what we shared yesterday about Cinderella. You may use post it flags to mark characteristics you want to include later on your Venn diagram." This restating of the purpose and expected outcome of the lesson in a more succinct manner serves as an intentional way of focusing the brain on what is essential (Wolfe, 2010). The goal is that over time, readers transfer and apply this skill and begin to set their own purposes for reading during independent reading and when confronted with unfamiliar genres.

Text Engagement

Unlike traditional round robin or popcorn reading formats where readers are not engaging at all times, a simultaneous reading format is utilized during the reading of the text. After the AYR is stated, readers are handed copies of the text being used. This may be in the form of authentic texts, leveled readers, newspaper clippings, magazines, poetry, content textbooks, or chapter books. Various reading formats are encouraged to encourage learners to read for different purposes and in a wide variety of texts. Candidates should be aware that behavioral observations of the reader, in addition to listening and providing feedback, are critical during this section. Anecdotal notes specifying reading gains and needs, in addition to reading behavior observations, should accompany this section in order for the candidate to track and notice patterns over time.

Follow-Up

After the candidate has listened to each learner read, all are asked to come to a close with the reading. The readers will transition to the assessment task that was modeled by the candidate during prepping the text, and that is aligned to the standard, the stated purpose, and the AYR. The assessment task may be written, oral, individual, or group, and may be graded or not. It is one piece of informal assessment that candidates should use to guide future small reading group planning. If the task were to be completed during reading, then readers would begin their second read while completing the task.

Wrap-Up

The wrap up is a dismissal of the readers from the small group that ties directly in to the standard, as opposed to the content of the book. University supervisors need to be cognizant about candidates leaving readers with skill/standard content, not text content. Candidates are to teach the reader the skill, not the book. Some wrap up examples might be:
- Tell me one comparison that is written on your Venn diagram between …
- Who can share one fact/opinion?
- Did anyone notice a character trait?

Learners leave the small reading group and return to whole group reading without any disruption to the reading culture in the classroom.

Candidate Reflection

Candidates fill in a quick reflection on the outcomes of the small group immediately following the wrap up. Preferably, this part will be completed after the learners leave the reading group and before the candidate assumes other classroom responsibilities. If the classroom teacher or university supervisor observed the lesson, the candidate should independently reflect on the planning, delivery, and outcome of the lesson before feedback is given in a shared conversation. This is for reflective purposes to assist the candidate with professional growth and with honing in on individual needs and gains of the readers. The following questions might guide the reflection:

- Did every reader master the standard? How did you know?
- Who would benefit from further instruction in this standard? How do you know?
- What one question could I have asked that would have probed deeper into the readers' thinking?
- Was the text complexity appropriate for this group of readers? How do you know?
- Was there anything that you would have done differently with this lesson? Why?

Summary

Over a series of semesters, the authors observed that the inability to understand the processes and structures of planning hindered candidates' ability to deliver instruction effectively. When the ELF was created and used as a planning tool for candidates throughout reading coursework, candidates were able to focus on learners' needs and how to teach the standards in a way that met those needs during field experience and clinical practice. The ELF assisted candidates with anchoring lesson planning around one standard and scaffolding instruction throughout the entire lesson based on individual readers' needs. A space for critical conversations was also created since there was a shared understanding of the planning process between the university supervisor, the classroom teacher, and the candidate. The ELF has proven to be an invaluable tool for increasing candidates' level of understanding regarding (a) content knowledge of the standard, (b) the standard expectation, (c) the lesson planning process, and (d) instructional delivery.

References

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Appendix A
Explicit Learning Framework (ELF) with Explanations for Candidate Support

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Teacher Candidate: (who will teach the lesson)

Title of Book/Text: (underline or italicize)   **Genre:** (non-fiction, poetry, fiction, etc…)

Standard: (choose ONE that will explicitly be taught; this is what will be assessed; include grade level)

will anchor the lesson and align to the wording of the Stated Purpose, the AYR, and the Follow Up

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Supplies: (materials that the candidate and the readers may need)

Focus: (gain readers' attention)

might be a quick question, picture, or statement to quickly focus readers on content or skill of lesson

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Stated Purpose: (This is what you will SAY to the readers; this aligns to the standard - "Today we will…")

aligns to the wording of the Standard, the AYR, and the Follow Up

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Word Instruction: (No more than five vocabulary and/or specialized terms are introduced; state any proper nouns/academic language – choose words that will aid in comprehension and fluency)

1.   vocabulary/specialized terms:

2.   proper nouns/academic language:

Text Features/Format: (what in the text is unusual – table of contents, photographs, labeled pictures, patterned sequence or rhyme, italicized words, underline words, dialogue, headings, Caldecott, Newberry, author summary, book jacket, copyright, dedication page, etc…)

language support [glossary/index]; contextual support – does the genre affect how the text is organized

Appendix A, Cont'd.

Prepping the Text: (this allows the reader to access schema prior to reading) ** There are TWO parts to this section *

3.   activating PK about <u>text</u> <u>content</u>: get readers thinking about CONTENT

4.   modeling <u>task to assess skill</u> that will be completed during text engagement – skill (STANDARD)

AYR: (this states the purpose for reading - tell readers exactly what they will be doing during and/or after reading; this helps to focus the reader and aids in comprehension)

5.   "As you're reading, I want you to…"

aligns to the Standard, the Stated Purpose, and the Follow Up

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Text Engagement: (lead with higher level questions that assesses standard; anecdotal notetaking)

6.   readers may complete a graphic organizer, quick write, highlight, etc… (have learners read the entire text through the 1st time without any task; during the 2nd reading, hot read, they may complete task)

this should be LONGEST section of entire ELF

Follow Up: (this is what candidate told readers they would be doing in the AYR; this is where a task is completed; this product relates directly to the standard)

7.   if task is started during 2nd read of text engagement, complete it here

a task may be individual or completed as a small group; there is no time for a lengthy writing activity

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Wrap Up: (how will you tie lesson together and dismiss readers from small group)

candidates may ask a dismissal question tied to the standard

Teacher Candidate Reflection: (the lesson should be reflected upon as soon after teaching as possible)

this may be handwritten, allowing for immediate reflection

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Appendix B
Explicit Learning Framework (ELF) Blank

Teacher Candidate:	
Title of Book/Text:	**Genre:**
Standard:	
Supplies:	
Focus:	
Stated Purpose:	
Word Instruction:	
Text Features/Format:	

Appendix B, Cont'd.

Prepping the Text:
AYR:
Text Engagement:
Follow Up:
Wrap Up:
Teacher Candidate Reflection:

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