

Professional Reflection

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Goodwin & Hubbell, (2013) remark in the conclusion of their book, *The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching*, that there seems to be a “performance plateau” after just a few years of teaching in most educators’ careers. They claim that after getting comfortable with the routines and challenges of teaching, we can become complacent and stop progressing in our expertise. I must admit that I have experienced this in the last year or so of teaching and not surprisingly I'm into my 4th year now. Part of the reason I'm studying in this program is because I've felt that it's time to make an intentional move towards professional development and provide myself a route out of the impending “performance rut”.

Luckily, there is a way to continually improve and as Goodwin and Hubbell (2013) say “The key to developing expertise may be to grow comfortable being perpetual amateurs... never really arriving at our destination.” Which means we should behave as amateurs and constantly reflect on our performance, in the context of our students’ performance, and consider what things we could be doing differently or more effectively; While also noticing the things that we're doing well, which work for our students, and being sure to continue those good practices. In that spirit, I shall reflect upon the lesson delivered and see what worked, and what could use some work.

Part One: What worked well

Unit 6 in the *Unlock 2 Reading and Writing Skills*, O’Neill, R. (2015) textbook, the delivered lesson, was focused on the skill and task of “Writing a paragraph to describe a graph”. As I explained in the previous paper, the book was set up to offer a basic lesson plan format

starting with an opportunity for an attention getting introduction. After which there are several reasonably sized exercises that only take about ten or fifteen minutes each to introduce the necessary skills and knowledge and then provide an opportunity for students to process and connect. During this time the teacher has an opportunity to circulate and give personal attention to groups, feedback, and reteach as necessary. All of this went very well in my lesson and just as planned. The students were able to ask for and receive clarification, the feedback was strong and even though it was quite difficult material for most of them, they were getting plenty of support to assimilate and consolidate the new vocab and grammar.

Part Two: What I would do differently

Where we ran into trouble was at the final part of the lesson, when we put it all together and each student should produce their own paragraph after having produced and edited one as a class. I believe that this is an integral part of the lesson since it allows each student to take full control and responsibility for their performance. For this they're required to understand each aspect sufficiently on their own and can't rely on their friends to fill in the blanks. However, we had to cut into the lesson time a bit to go over the upcoming exam and review some of the things that would be tested. This resulted in not having time for the final exercise and we had to settle with the group paragraph effort, which is not ideal. They were of course instructed to write their paragraphs on their own and check it against a model paragraph and a rubric, but with the exam week coming up in just a couple days, I doubt many of them got the chance. The main reason for the intrusion into our lesson was because of a couple of holidays here that set us back a bit in our schedule. Thailand has the most national holidays of any country and it can sometimes be difficult to make much progress when you have a break every couple weeks. However, I think I

could work around it better in the future by not only providing the exam information online, which I already do, but assigning a task that requires the students to review, understand and write about the upcoming exam so that I can clarify questions in short order and spare our classroom time.

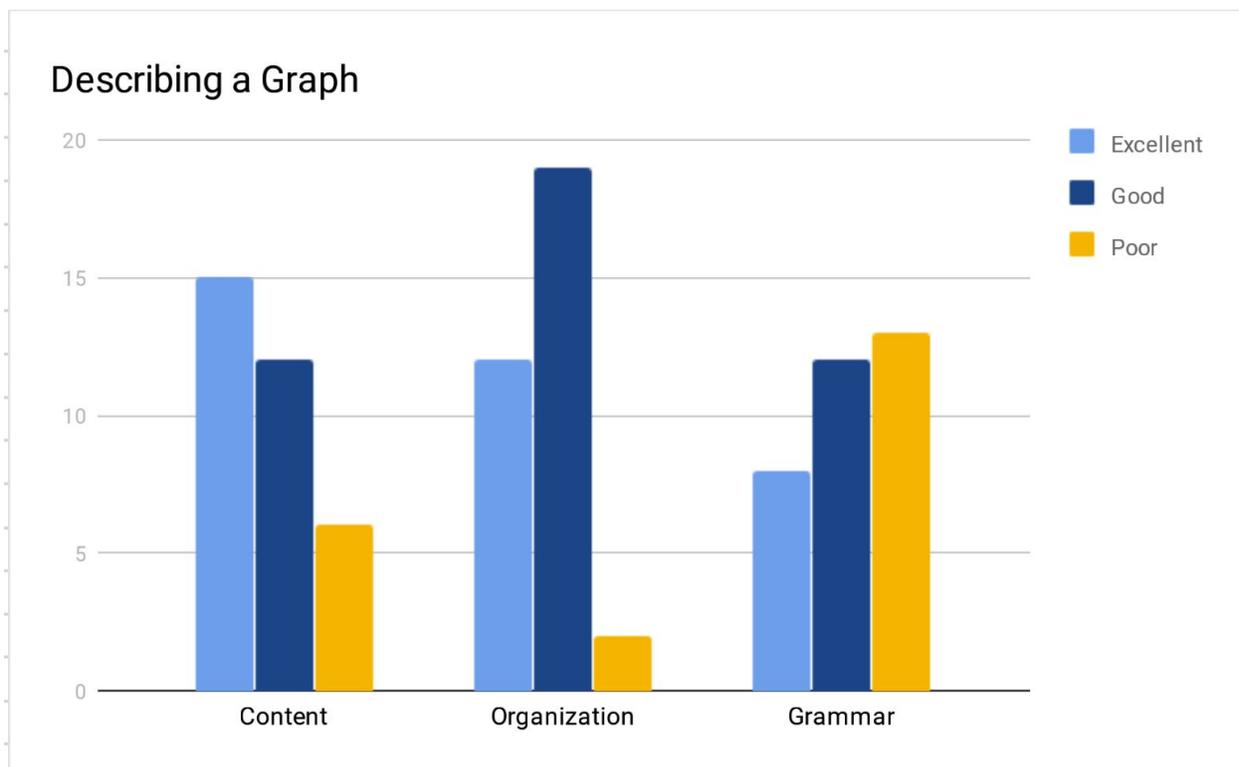
Part Three: What else to consider

Another issue that we tend to have in that course is with regards to the online exercises that are part of the textbook. I often ask the students who complete them whether or not they feel that it was helpful to their understanding or mastery of the language being learned; they generally tell me it is helpful, so I believe that it's something that should be utilized.

Unfortunately, while the students usually start off strong with nearly three quarters of the class completing the online work, that number typically trails off to about half, then 25 percent near the end of the course. I've seen some videos about flipped classroom learning where they offer time on computers in class to the students who don't finish it on their own. We don't really have that capability at my school, but I think I could use a reward system to get them to utilize that online practice. My idea is to offer a prize, a raffle for each unit, only the students who finish the online work for each unit will be entered in the raffle. Perhaps it could be just one larger prize at the end of the course, before the final exam, and they will be entered once for each unit completed. The more units completed, the better their chance of winning. I know that it's not the best idea to give out rewards for studying, but in this case, I think it could work well.

Results

We weren't able to score each student individually on this paragraph because there was no time to complete individual paragraphs. However, while choosing sentences for the group paragraph, I was able to get a rough score for each group on the three variables that I used in the pre-assessment of the previous paragraph. The scores came out considerably better than in the pre-assessment. I think two main factors contributed to the increase; firstly, they have had an extra month of practice with the paragraph organization and learning how to include the required content for each unit. Secondly, they were working in groups and so the paragraph should reflect the highest skilled student in each group. Here are the results:



As expected, there was a marked improvement in the content and organization areas, but not much difference with the grammar. Grammar is not something that can be mastered quickly whereas the other two components are fairly simple to clarify.

In Conclusion, this has been an excellent opportunity to really pick apart the components and different aspects of a lesson and measure them against proven and studied methodology. I can already see where improvements can be made and the roadmap for my own professional development has become clear. I'm sincerely grateful for the opportunity to have studied this course and the wonderful gift of my portfolio project website which I believe will be a hugely beneficial tool, not only for myself, but for my colleagues as well.

References

- Goodwin, B. (2013). *The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching: A Checklist for Staying Focused Every Day* [Kindle Android version]. Retrieved from Amazon.com
- O'Neill, R. (2015). *Unlock 2 Reading and Writing Skills*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.