

#### **STANDARD 4: INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION MAKING**

According to Missouri's Show-Me Standards, in Communication Arts, students in Missouri public schools will acquire a solid foundation which includes knowledge of and proficiency in speaking and writing Standard English (including grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization). First graders in Missouri are required to develop and apply skills and strategies to the reading process and print concept, by using upper and lower case letters, show first and last letters in words, use appropriate directionality in letter and word order and recognize that punctuation has meaning. This is a DOK level 3 goal requiring the students to formulate complete sentences using the appropriate elements of a sentence. The objectives of this unit is for the students to be able to formulate complete sentences using at least one noun and a verb, properly form letters and words using appropriate spacing, as well as use the appropriate punctuation and capitalization for each sentence developed.

In order to determine what information the students already knew or were exposed to, the Kindergarten Grade Level Expectations were referred to. As teachers "learn where (their) students have been, where they are now, and what they need to learn next, the more effective (their) teaching will be" (Fiderer, 1995, p. 11). In kindergarten, the students were expected to demonstrate concepts of print recognizing directionality left to right, return sweep, top and bottom, develop an understanding that the story is in print, are capable of word to word matching, and recognizing the distinction between letter and word. Since Kindergarten is not a requirement for the state of Missouri, a baseline had to be established to determine that each student was able to perform at the minimum DESE's expectations for kindergarten. Observations during reading and communication arts sessions helped to determine that a majority of the students were able to perform the skills expected of Kindergarten students in Missouri. All of the

students in the class attended a kindergarten program on a full time basis with the exception of one student that attended Kindergarten at Timewise Elementary for a half day due to behavior issues. This determined that all of the students were exposed to many if not all of the expectations for kindergarteners. Having the foundation already laid, the new lessons could now build upon this foundation. The ELL student's struggle with the essential phonetic skills needed for reading and spelling places a large amount of stress on the student. While the focus of this unit is correct sentence writing, the ELL student's phonetic skill deficiency affects many other areas that require composition of independent thoughts. Many of the lessons will have prewritten words that will need to be manipulated in some way. Many of the students are tactile learners and require active learning sessions in order to fully understand the content being taught. Keeping this in mind, the lessons will require various types of movement and interactions with others. The smart board, computer lab, television connected to the computer, and projector will be incorporated throughout the unit's lessons to provide a variety of platforms for the students to exercise their newly acquired skills as well exposing them to the various types of technology. Observations will be the primary form of assessment throughout the unit.

Students will be observed during each activity in order to determine which students need additional instruction in a small group setting. Formal assessments will be given at the end of each week to determine if the skill has been attained. In order for the skill to be considered mastered, the students must score at or above 80%. For individual goals, the students will be assessed on the current skill taught with review questions about prior skills. The pre-assessment scoring rubric will grant students a maximum of three points for each skill being assessed. The same scoring rubric will be used for both the mid-point assessment and the post-assessment.

A major challenge for the students will be the environment in which they live. Many of the students speak in broken English, slang, or a heavy colloquial speech. Teaching at this school poses a unique set of circumstances in which there are families of various cultural backgrounds, different socio-economic status, and educational levels. Some of the students are raised hearing and speaking various dialects. This will inevitably affect the students' ability to formulate complete sentences. Many of the incorrect sentences may sound correct to these students. Data from the pre-assessment showed that students scored extremely low in formulating complete sentences as a class with an average score of 43%. Exposing the students to proper articulation within the classroom and supporting the district's curriculum with a literature based curriculum will assist the students in developing proper English. Another challenge is that the community in which the school is located changes often. Families move in and out often meaning that the classroom dynamics change often as well. Newer students will need additional support using small groups and partnering the students with others that are excelling in the classroom. Homework and website recommendations will prove helpful as well. For the students without Internet access at home, using the classroom student computers during free times will not only build their understanding of the lessons but will also allow the teacher make observations and provide assistance if needed.

In the process of learning to punctuate sentences using exclamation marks, the students began labeling all sentences that were not questions exclamations. They were first exposed to statements, then questions and finally exclamations. At one particular morning message activity, the students began labeling all of the statements exclamations using the justification that they would be excited about whatever the statement said. The thought process was, if they could be excited about what was said then it was automatically an exclamation. In truth, they were taught

that the main “sign” that a sentence is an exclamation was that the sentence stated something that elicited excitement. Forgetting that first graders are easily excited, the lesson became a confusing mess fast. The session was halted so that a reiteration of what an exclamation truly was could be given as well as several examples of exclamations and statements. The session had a drill and kill feeling to it but the students needed to understand the difference between the two types of sentences. Students were even chosen to act out statements and exclamations so that they could recognize the distinction between the two. The acting out of the sentences finally helped the students understand the two types of sentences but there was also an acceptance that there would still be many statements that would be considered exclamations to the students since they believed that the topic was in fact exciting to them.

During another session the students were identifying complete sentences but were having difficulty differentiating from the complete and incomplete sentences. While dialect played a role in the difficulties, it also came to light that the students were not familiar with the particulars of city life. Many of the students were born and raised in rural environments and therefore have never been exposed to city life. The students were read a story about a day in the city and were then given a page with manipulated sentences about the story. They were told to identify the incomplete sentences and make them complete. Well, the session was plagued with questions about what certain items were and how they were used. Recognizing the problem, the lesson ended up being more about city life than complete sentences. The class was able to look up elements of city life and streaming videos that depicted this environment. Needless to say, the next session’s materials were carefully selected so that the content of the material did not hinder the purpose of the lesson.

The lessons were adapted to fit the needs of the students at that particular moment. The lesson about exclamations was much more detailed than it was originally intended to be. The session was intended to be a practice/ review session but ended up being a complete lesson and in fact even more detailed than the original lesson was. Adding the “acting out” portion helped the student’s make connections to material that they originally had not. In actuality the on-the-spot lesson was much more productive than the original lesson was. The lesson about complete sentences introduced new material with the new skill taught. New skills should always be paired with familiar material so that the focus of the lesson stays true. The entire instructional objective was dropped and the new material, city life, was delved into deeper. The students were given a mini social studies lesson about city life and were excited to learn about it. The original objective was revisited during another session. The mini-lesson on city life was informative and fun for the students. It was a much needed break from the frustration that accompanied the original lesson.