What’s Essential?

Seven Essential Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning

Bellingham Public School
May 2004

Approved for discussion by BEA-District Labor Management Committee 10-7-04
What’s Essential? Seven Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning

The Problem
Teachers and administrators are constantly asking the question, “What are the essential best practices for instruction that will ensure that my students learn?” Several groups of educators have all tried to answer this question. Although resources for a response to this question are found in the Bellingham School District Teacher Criterion, in the District Curriculum Guides, in the state documents about standards, and in the literature about best practices, they are open to individual interpretation.

New teachers wondered exactly what was meant by each of the criterion and indicators that are used for supervision and evaluation. University supervisors and cooperating teachers supporting interns struggled to consistently describe powerful teaching according to the standards. How could a district begin to describe the consistent, essential teaching behaviors that one would see in all K – 12 classrooms?

The Rationale
Several groups of teachers and administrators were asked why it would be important to describe the essential strategies for powerful teaching and learning. Groups included the Bellingham School District and Woodring College of Education Partnership Coordinating Board, groups of teachers and administrators, participants in the Joint Learning Institute, and Bellingham District mentors. Here are the reasons stated by these groups:

- Statements describe consistent expectations for all teachers and administrators.
- Clear statements support the development of consistent understandings about powerful teaching across all K – 12 Classrooms.
- Mentors, Coaches, and Administrators have a clear direction and understanding.
- Statements assist in aligning the understandings about powerful teaching when working with University Partnerships and Interns.
- A description of the essential powerful teaching statements supports the implementation of common practices and the understanding of the language and intent of district curriculum.

The Process
September, 2003 The Western Washington University and Bellingham School District Partnership Coordinating Board was charged with developing a seamless-continuum of support of professional development for pre service, induction, and career teachers. An important component would be a common understanding of what is powerful teaching and learning. Two Joint Learning Institutes would be held in January and April to describe powerful teaching and learning.

October 2003 The literature base for powerful teachers was shared at the K – 8 Grade Level Meetings in order to develop an initial understanding of what research says about “Best Practices”.

January, 2004 Sixty University and District staff made up of teachers (selected by the Bellingham Education Association) and administrators attend the first Joint Learning Institute to learn about aligned systems with common understandings, standards, and tools to support the development of pre service and first year teachers.

January – March 2004 A group of teachers and administrators participate in a district professional development study group using Classroom Instruction That Works by Robert Marzano as a resource.

February & March 2004 At the winter grade level meetings, teachers looked at the nine classroom practices that research says make the most impact on student learning.

April 2004 Thirty teachers and administrators (who attended the Joint Learning Institute) met together to describe what are the essential strategies for powerful teaching and learning that we would expect to see

Approved for discussion by BEA-District Labor Management Committee 10-7-04
The group identified seven instructional strategy concepts. They also described what the strategy would look like and sound like when a teacher is using it. A draft of the work was sent to all the participants. Volunteers from this group would be responsible for “word smithing” the draft statements and sending the revised work out to the Association and District Leadership for further input.

**April 2004** At the second Joint Learning Institute, the participants used the district seven strategies to align with the university standards. The group also described indicators for each of the statements. Our indicators came from the research literature, the Professional Certificate Standards and Indicators, and INTASC Standards and Indicators.

**August – April** The District Leadership studies effective schools research by Jeff Fouts, reads Robert Marzano’s *Classroom Instruction That Works*, develops common definition of objectives, and reviews draft statements of the essential strategies for powerful teaching and learning.

**May 2004** The District Leadership reviewed the seven statements, indicators, and looks like/sounds like descriptors. Several suggestions were provided.

**May 2004** The “word smithing” group met to clarify the intent of each statement. They revised the word choice to use less jargon and use more language that would be commonly understood by all who would use these statements. The group aligned the indicators and looks like and sounds like phrases to ensure that each added clarity to the essential statement. The revised draft was sent to the district participants who helped develop the statements and to both district and association leadership.

**June 2004** Plans for further input as well as strategies for sharing these statements more broadly over the 2004/2005 school year will be developed.

### The Participants

Thirty District Participants for Joint Learning Institute and in the development of the seven essential strategies of powerful teaching and learning: Adrienne Nelson, Leslie Adcock-McInnis, Tim Binderup, Andrea Buckley, Chris Carty, Lisa Conlon, Jeff Coulter, Steve Dolmatz, Becky Elmendorf, Ann Marie Hanel, Deborah Hanson, Edie Holcomb, Mark Kerr, Dale Kinsley, Rebeca Lacey, Rob McElroy, Nora Klewiada, Lisa Peterson, Julia Ritchie, Scott Smartt, Karen Tracy, Teresa Van Haalen, James Walsh, Becky Walstad, Susan Zoller, Shirley Potter, Fred Chung, Laurie Mueller, Sue Thomas, and Josie Estrada.


Word Smithing Team: Steve Dolmatz, Leslie McInnis, Lisa Peterson, Lisa Conlon, Ann Marie Hanel, and Adrienne Nelson

Bellingham School District and Woodring College of Education Partnership Coordinating Board: Lisa Conlon, Steve Dolmatz, Leslie McInnis, Shirley Potter, Rob McElroy, Becky Elmendorf, Jeff Coutler, Stephanie Salzman, Dale Kinsley, Susan Zoller, Sheila Fox, David Carroll, Lauren McClennenhan, Bill Lay, Marv Klein, and Adrienne Nelson

Facilitators of the Process: Shirley Potter, Susan Zoller and Adrienne Nelson

Approved for discussion by BEA-District Labor Management Committee 10-7-04
The primary focus for any teacher must be teaching and learning that supports students to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. Teachers must attend to four essential teaching behaviors 1) assessing prior learning using a variety of assessment tools, 2) evaluating the assessment data in terms of what students can do, need to learn next, and what the teacher will do about it, 3) planning for instruction includes selecting the objective, grouping strategies, level of support, and resources, and 4) implementing instruction based on learning theory and teacher understanding.

The Teaching and Learning Cycle, as shown below, shows the four teaching behaviors as a recursive and cyclical process. Effective teachers purposely plan blocks of instruction to include these four essential teaching behaviors. The four behaviors, when in place and practiced consistently, ensure that instruction meets the learner’s needs.
A group of Bellingham School District teachers and administrators have identified a commonly held set of seven classroom instructional strategies for powerful teaching and learning that engage all students to achieve at higher levels. These Seven Essential Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning represent a shared understanding among staff and administrators.

Statement 1
Teachers continuously assess and monitor student learning.

Statement 2
Teachers give students continuous, relevant feedback based on assessment data.

Statement 3
Teachers provide a classroom environment that actively engages all students in learning.

Statement 4
Teachers differentiate by using a variety of instructional strategies based on the assessed strengths, needs, and interest of their students.

Statement 5
Teachers implement whole group, small group, and individual instruction that provides for independent application and practice.

Statement 6
Teachers utilize a continuum of support leading to responsible, independent learners.

Statement 7
Teachers identify and articulate clear learning objectives based on grade level expectations and assessment of students needs.
Seven Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning

I. Using On-Going Assessment Tools

II. Giving Continuous Feedback

III. Engaging All Students

IV. Differentiating Instruction

V. Grouping Students in a Flexible Manner

VI. Selecting Appropriate Levels of Support

VII. Making Objectives Clear to the Learners
I. On Going Assessment

Statement: *Teachers continuously assess and monitor student learning.*

Indicators:
- Teacher develops and uses formal and informal assessments based on best practices.
- Teacher uses assessment data to inform instructional decision-making and provides feedback about the whole child.
- Teacher uses a variety of assessments to monitor and adjust instruction.
- Teacher includes students in goal setting, developing assessments and engaging in self-assessment.
- Teacher adjusts instruction while teaching, based on ongoing assessment.
- Teacher clearly articulates learning standards and assessment parameters ahead of time.

Looks like/Sounds like:
- Recording assessments
- Monitoring and interacting with all students
- Adjusting instruction based on...
- Asking students to self-assess and evaluate
- Utilizing a variety of assessment tools
- Assessing confidence, affect, behavior, learning, objective, prior knowledge
- Reteaching and revisiting
- Questioning for understanding
- Posing open-ended questions
- Investigating students’ thinking processes
- Communicating about assessments

Literature and Research Base:


II. Continuous Feedback

Statement: Teachers give students continuous, relevant feedback based on assessment data.

Indicators:
- Teacher gives feedback that is timely, corrective, relevant, and specific to a criterion.
- Teacher gives honest, equitable feedback that is appropriate for each student.
- Teacher provides students with feedback that is relevant and supports development of a lifelong learner.
- Teacher ensures that students receive feedback from a variety of sources: teacher, peers and self.

Looks like/Sounds like:
- Conferencing with students
- Using rubrics to describe levels of understanding or competence
- Using grading to give accurate feedback to students about a specific criterion
- Allowing for risk taking
- Asking students to self assess and to engage in peer assessment
- Keeping records of student performances

Literature and Research Base:


Approved for discussion by BEA-District Labor Management Committee 10-7-04
III. Active Engagement

Statement: *Teachers provide a classroom environment that actively engages all students in learning.*

Indicators:
- Teacher provides a safe and comfortable environment in which risk taking is both modeled and encouraged.
- Teacher provides authentic and meaningful content and activities that connect to the students’ prior learning.
- Teacher provides opportunities for learners to self-select appropriate learning strategies.

Looks like/Sounds like:
- Personalizing learning
- Encouraging students to inquire independently
- Modeling the process for students that they will be using
- Incorporating opportunities for students to practicing knowledge and skills in real ways
- Allowing for risk taking
- Giving relevant responses to students
- Holding high expectations for all learners
- Using strategies that promote cooperation among peers and students taking responsibility for their learning
- Designing classroom with resources that appropriately immerse students in learning
- Stating the value or purpose for learning
- Utilizing a variety of resources to activate learning

Literature and Research Base:


Approved for discussion by BEA-District Labor Management Committee 10-7-04
IV. Differentiation of Instruction

**Statement:** Teachers differentiate by using a variety of instructional strategies based on the assessed strengths, needs, and interest of their students.

**Indicators:**
- Teacher matches instruction and materials to the assessed needs, interests and ability of the students.
- Teacher effectively provides for individual students who have particular learning differences and needs (ex: ELL, IEP, HCL).
- Teacher provides relevant, respectful instruction that leads to authentic tasks that are applicable to the real world.
- Teacher assesses student’s needs, interest and abilities in multiple ways.
- Teacher modifies content, process, and products.

**Looks like/Sounds like:**
- Providing accommodations and modifications
- Using several resources at various levels
- Utilizing a variety of teaching processes during the lesson
- Incorporating a variety of resources and projects
- Implementing projects that are authentic and meaningful
- Meeting student needs
- Working with different groups at various times
- Dialoging among students and teachers
- Providing opportunities for student decision making and choices

**Literature and Research Base:**


V. Flexible Grouping

**Statement 5:** Teachers implement whole group, small group and individual instruction that provides for independent application and practice.

**Indicators:**
- Teacher groups and regroups students appropriately to meet the diverse needs of all learners.
- Teacher instructs students in the classroom procedures for group or independent learning.
- Teacher models roles and responsibilities of participants in a learning community.
- Teacher engages every student intellectually regardless of grouping structure.
- Teacher organizes the physical environment that is conducive to a variety of grouping structures.
- Teacher facilitates and monitors individual and group learning.

**Looks like/Sounds like:**
- Forming groups for specific or immediate needs
- Forming groups that would work on extensive project or assignment
- Forming long term groups to promote a sense of community
- Ensuring positive interdependence
- Teaching interpersonal and small group skills (listening, trusting, leadership, decision making, conflict resolution)

**Literature & Research Base:**


VI. Levels of Support

Statement: Teachers utilize a continuum of support leading to responsible, independent learners.

Indicators:
- Teacher uses multiple teaching/learning strategies to engage students in active learning opportunities in the development of critical thinking and in problem solving.
- Teacher helps students identify and use learning resources
- Teacher monitors and adjusts strategies in response to learner feedback.
- Teacher support is on a continuum from direct modeling/instruction to more indirect/facilitative support.
- Teacher models thinking and guides student learning
- Teacher provides a relevant, meaningful context for applying learning.

Looks like/Sounds like:
- Demonstrating and thinking aloud
- Forming groups based on how much support is needed (guided and shared)
- Moving around room and interacting with groups and individual students and reteaching as necessary
- Supporting students in learning at the right level of difficulty
- Asking questions to promote higher level thinking and further exploration of topic
- Acknowledging multiple approaches to solutions
- Responding to students questions
- Guiding students to make inferences and connections

Literature and Research Base:


VII. Making Objectives Clear

**Statement:** Teachers identify and articulate clear learning objectives based on grade level expectations and assessment of students needs.

**Indicators:**
- Teacher states what is to be learned to the class.
- Teacher designs objectives that accommodate the individual and constructivist nature of the learning process.
- Teacher develops objectives that describe the performance, conditions, and quality of response.

**Looks like/Sounds like:**
- Writing the objective on the board
- Referencing state EALRs, GLEs, district curriculum
- Personalizing objectives through written goals (I can, I am learning to, checklist, etc.)
- Connecting objectives to outside life
- Stating “We will learn…”
- Having students articulate why they are learning the objective (application)
- Basing objectives on assessment data

**Literature & Research Base:**

