An Overview of the Teacher Work Sample

Introduction
Brief History and Description of the TWS
The Importance of Student Achievement

Introduction

The teacher work sample is both a product of student teaching and part of the process of student teaching. As a product, the teacher work sample can serve as a measure of a student teacher’s ability to promote student achievement, as documentation that teacher candidates have met minimum national standards, and as a source of validation for a teacher education program. As a process, engaging in teacher work sample methodology can broaden and deepen the thinking of student teachers, as well as enable teacher education faculty to improve course alignment, make better connections for teacher candidates between theory and practice, and identify authentic teaching performances that lead to improved P-12 student achievement.

The TWS prompt, which serves as both a planning and reflection tool, directs student teachers to describe their learning goals, lesson structure, and assessment strategy prior to teaching. After finishing, student teachers utilize assessment data to analyze student learning and reflect on potential adjustments for succeeding lessons. Completing the TWS serves as a kind of “cognitive apprenticeship” (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989) by prompting student teachers to plan, reflect upon, and revise their teaching the way an expert teacher might. Otherwise, this kind of implicit, expert thinking may not be accessible to student teachers without the intervention of their supervising teacher, a hit or miss proposition at best.

Brief History and Description of the Teacher Work Sample
Initially, the TWS was developed at Western Oregon University for the purpose of requiring student teachers to demonstrate a minimal level of competency before receiving licensure (Shalock & Myton, 1988). The University of Northern Iowa’s involvement with the teacher work sample methodology began in association with ten teacher preparation universities belonging to The Renaissance Group and located in California, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The Renaissance Group utilized the University of Western Oregon's research, development, and previous experience to develop its own version of the teacher work sample, as part of a five-year Title II Federal Grant originally funded in 1999 and entitled "Improving Teacher Quality" (The Renaissance Partnership, 2002). Completed teacher work samples consist of a description and analysis of a 2-3 week teaching unit, are approximately 20 pages or more in length, and are written in response to the Teacher Work Sample Performance Prompt (The Renaissance Partnership, 2002), which is organized into sections representing the following seven teaching processes:

1. Contextual Factors: In this section of the teacher work sample, preservice teachers are prompted to analyze contextual information to plan instruction and assessment, including community, district, and school factors; classroom factors; and student characteristics. More specifically, student characteristics would include factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, special needs, developmental levels, culture, language, interests, learning styles, or skill levels. As part of the contextual factors, preservice teachers discuss at least six implications for their instruction.

2. Learning Goals: Preservice teachers are prompted to set appropriate and challenging learning goals; to show how the goals are aligned with local, state or national
standards; to describe the types and levels of their learning goals; and to discuss why their learning goals are appropriate in terms of development, prerequisite knowledge, and other students needs.

3. Assessment Plan: Preservice teachers are prompted to provide an overview of their assessment plan; to align their pre-and post-assessments with their learning goals; and to discuss their plan for formative assessment.

4. Design for Instruction: Preservice teachers are prompted to analyze the results of their pre-assessment, to provide an overview of their unit, to describe at least three activities that reflect a variety of instructional strategies, to explain why they are planning these specific activities, and to describe how they will use technology in their instruction.

5. Instructional Decision-Making: Preservice teachers are prompted to describe a time during their unit when student response caused them to modify their original design for instruction. Two classroom episodes are identified, the adaptations are explained, and a rationale for the change is given.

6. Analysis of Student Learning: Preservice teachers are prompted to analyze student assessment data in relation to the unit learning goals at three levels of analysis. At the first level, pre- and post-assessment data are compared for the whole class in relation to all the learning goals. At the second level, preservice teachers divide the class into at least two subgroups (e.g. gender, performance level, socioeconomic status, or language proficiency) and analyze pre- and post-assessment data in relation to one learning goal. At the third level, the pre-, formative, and post-assessment data of two individual students are analyzed.
7. **Reflection and Self-Evaluation**: Preservice teachers are prompted to evaluate their performance based on student learning. They reflect on learning goals for which students were most and least successful, identify future actions for improved practice, and describe at least two professional activities that will contribute to their professional growth.

Typically, graphs, charts, and samples of student work are also included in appendices. The complete prompt, scoring rubrics and teacher work sample exemplars can be found at the Improving Teacher Quality website <http://fp.uni.edu/itq>.

The prompt cues student teachers to make deeper, richer and more explicit connections across the seven teaching processes in the teacher work sample, e.g., the assessment plan is linked to the learning goals which are linked to the instructional design. This has been cited as one of the most significant benefits of engaging in teacher work sample methodology (Girod, 2002). In addition, both the teacher work sample prompt and the associated rubrics require student teachers to transcend mere description and explain the how and why of their decisions, plans, and actions. For example, in the “Contextual Factors,” student teachers are directed to draw “Instructional Implications” from the “Community, District, and School Factors,” “Classroom Factors,” and “Student Characteristics.” Potentially, student teachers will internalize all of these components into an overarching framework through which they can reflect on both student achievement and their teaching performance. As one UNI graduate reported, “The teacher work sample helped me reflect on my lessons. Did I assess and teach the information contained in my learning goals? This has continued to occur even after my teacher work sample.”
The Importance of Student Achievement

What distinguishes the teacher work sample from previous licensure requirements is its emphasis on improving P-12 student achievement. In contrast to National Board Certification, INTASC, or Praxis III; the teacher work sample provides written evidence of the student teacher's ability to have a positive impact student learning (Schalock et al., 1998; Girod, 2002). As part of the teacher work sample, student teachers design a plan for collecting pre-, post-, and formative assessment data; and then use that data to conduct an analysis of student learning that considers the whole class, subgroups of the class, and at least two individual students. For example, here is a very short excerpt taken from the "Analysis of Learning" section of a second grade literature unit.

To analyze the students as a whole class, I took data from the pre- and post-test and compared them. The "Individual Scores Learning Goal #3" chart showed the results of one learning goal. From this graph, it is easy to conclude that the students that showed the least amount of growth were students C and G. Student G did not show any growth from the pre-test to the post-test. Student G had a difficult time on the post-test because it included a lot of writing. The students that showed a lot of improvement were students A and L. I was pleased to see that student L's score improved because we worked together during recess on his writing. Student A showed more improvement because I believe she took the post-test more seriously.

The relationships uncovered during the analysis are included in the teacher work sample in the form of charts, graphs, or other visual representations. Denner et al. (2001) found that if student teachers can do well on the "Analysis of Student Learning," they are
likely to receive a high overall score on the teacher work sample. While student teachers at the University of Northern Iowa often feel challenged by this component of the teacher work sample, they also express appreciation for the insights it affords. As one graduate commented: “This was a rewarding experience because I was able to prove that my students will leave third grade knowing more because of my teaching. I can make a difference.”

References


The Renaissance Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality Project. (2002). The Teacher Work Sample. [tp://fp.uni.edu/itq](tp://fp.uni.edu/itq)