NAEYC Standard 4: Using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families

Artifact description-

In order to demonstrate my competencies with each of the elements of standard 4 I chose to use three separate artifacts; each artifact pertains to my second student teaching placement. As a student teacher I spent 9 weeks at an elementary school in Wilmington Delaware in a first grade classroom with 23 students, all of which were English Language Learners. My cooperating teacher was an ELL teacher. Mrs. C. taught in English and followed the principles of the SIOP model (Sheltered Instructional Operation Protocol) with the goal of making grade level content accessible to English Language Learners. This elementary school is considered a Tier 1 and a Tier 3 school with a very high population of Spanish speaking students.

As my artifacts I selected the classroom profile form that I completed for this group of students detailing the number of students, how many were English language Learners, and how many had an identified IEP. Also within the classroom profile I added a note to show that while all of the students within the classroom were English Language Learners of Hispanic descent they all ranged in their language proficiency and were placed on a scale of proficiency from a level 1 to a level 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest and bridging into mainstream). The second artifact I chose in support of standard 4 is a letter written by my cooperating teacher outlining how I used my bilingual abilities to promote communication both in the classroom with children and families as well as in translated materials sent home to the parents. In the letter Mrs. C. also detailed how I used my bilingual abilities to assist in translating for parent-teacher conferences by translating as well as using my own words to elaborate on different points of the conference with my own observations. As the final artifact I selected my written reflection from my first week as a student teacher in this first grade classroom with Mrs. C. In my reflection I go into detail about how I used my first week to observe and get to know each student and begin building a rapport with individual children. I also reflected on the need for differentiated instruction based on individual children’s needs both academically and in regards to language proficiency. Furthermore I reflected on the strategies that I observed being used by Mrs. C. in making grade level content accessible to this group of students; she used both direct instruction as well as small group instruction and whenever possible she would incorporate play within her teaching techniques. As a goal I had the hope of taking my observations and applying them in my own way to be able to use all three strategies for making the content accessible to my group of students in much the same way that I saw Mrs. C. had accomplished.

Artifact analysis-

Within my reflection of week 1 and my work with translations for parents I was able to demonstrate my competence with understanding the importance of positive relationships and interactions as the foundation of my work with children. Within my reflection I expressed that my role for the first week was to observe and get to know each child. I used the first week at my placement to get to know the students and begin to build a rapport with each of them. Being an extra teacher in the
room I was also able to provide them with extra support as I circulated the room during direct instruction in different curriculum areas. By providing this extra support I was able to demonstrate to the children that I had a genuine interest in helping them succeed as students.

In my reflection I also discussed that in that first week I was able to use my Spanish speaking abilities to communicate with the students in their home language as a way to encourage a personal connection between us and further solidify that adult-child relationship between the teacher and the student. I wanted the students to know that they could be comfortable with me and that there would be no language barrier when interacting with me. In that first week I noticed that many students preferred to speak in English all day at school while other students sometimes (not often) found themselves looking for English words that they just were not confident enough to use and so I let them know that if they ever struggle with retrieving an English word that they can come to me and speak to me in Spanish so that I can assist them in finding the appropriate English words to use. By incorporating my bilingual abilities in my interactions with these children I feel that I was successful in creating a safe zone for those students who struggled with their confidence in their English speaking abilities.

When thinking about positive relationships and supportive interactions as being the foundation for work with young children I first thought of the adult-child interaction between a teacher and a student, but there is also the more important adult-child relationship that exists between a child and their caregiver. Over the years in the early childhood education program I have learned that the latter adult-child relationship can play a crucial part in a young child’s development and learning. Unfortunately while student-teaching at this elementary school I did not have very many opportunities to interact with parents and families as the majority of the students arrive on a school bus or are dropped off in the car rider lane but not walked into the classroom. My way of supporting the adult-child relationship between my students and their caregivers was by providing translations for notes home, invitations to family events, and for any homework pages that were confusing for the child or the parent. In this way Spanish speaking parents would have the same opportunity as English speaking parents to be an active part of their child’s learning and development.

For Mrs. C. and I, our goal was to facilitate the success of our students by helping the parents be successful and have opportunities to become involved with their child’s education. During the parent conferences, as outlined in the letter from Mrs. C., I was able to meet with 4 of my students parents and translate Mrs. C.’s observations and concerns. Together Mrs. C. and I were able to supply parents with answers and suggestions for meeting their own concerns about their child and we were also able to provide the parents with a few simple strategies for helping their students complete their homework (specifically their reading logs). From the conferences, one interaction that really stood out for me and was that Mrs. C. and I were able to communicate our concerns for a specific students speech and with me there the parent was able to explain to me that she had many of the same concerns so in the end the three of us were able to collaborate and set up a plan in order to support her child both in the classroom and at home and we were also able to receive the mother’s consent to request speech services for her child. Because I was not simply translating word for word for Mrs. C. in the conference and was able to have a comfortable conversation with this mother about her child I am happy to say
that the process of obtaining speech services has begun for this specific student who will really benefit from such services.

Within my reflection of my first week student teaching at the elementary school I was able to display my competencies with knowing and understanding effective tools and strategies for early education, as well as my abilities to use a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate teaching and learning approaches. As I reflected on my first week I described my responsibilities during the English Language arts block of the day in which I was responsible for conducting small group reading lessons using short decodable readers that corresponded with the unit skills for that week. In this classroom the students were placed in one of four groups depending on their abilities in English and language arts, the groups were labeled by the colors blue, green, red, and orange and ranged from the highest level of readers to the lowest level of readers respectively. As I met with each group in that first week I was able to get to know the students and begin to understand where they stood with their English language proficiency and confidence. When differentiating instruction I took into account their language proficiency, as well as their level of reading ability in order to provide instruction that was both challenging and within their zone of proximal development. As I conducted differentiated instruction I fostered oral language and communication by providing a small amount of assistance in Spanish when I felt that it was appropriate and needed. I based my decision for supplementing with Spanish by taking into account the characteristics and needs of the individual children that were represented in each small group. I was able to be conscious of both language and culture while using differentiation as a developmentally appropriate approach to teaching.

At the end of my written reflection I was able to take what I observed from Mrs. C.’s teaching style and reflect back to my own experiences or in-experiences in this case, to develop a goal for myself as I began this placement. I observed that there was much more direct instruction in this classroom than I had ever seen or experienced before, but Mrs. C. still managed to have a connection to meaningful play and engaging experiences that supported the children’s learning and development. In my reflection I discussed how Mrs. C. first had the students create their own terrariums and aquariums before asking them to discuss and write about the topic; her reasoning was that it was not developmentally appropriate to ask young children to discuss or write about something they may not have ever seen or heard of before especially considering the specific group of students and their limited access to natural settings where they would see the items found in a terrarium and be able to explore them. My goal was to be able to take my observations of Mrs. C. and be able to incorporate both teaching styles (direct instruction and play) into my own teaching practices with this group of students.

Reflection-

Overall my experiences with the artifacts that I used to support standard 4 were very effective in providing me with opportunities to grow in my competency with carrying out the standard. I was able to use my class profile form in order to help me get an idea of the group of students that I would be working with and planning for, this prepared me for providing differentiated instruction not only based on academic skills but also based on language proficiency for each student. Using written reflections to

Sample of student work (actual names and places removed)
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think back on my own practices has provided me with the opportunity to consider which strategies worked or did not work and it also has allowed me to set appropriate goals for myself regarding the specific group of children that I am working with. When reflecting on my own practices I have the ability to set goals that I feel will promote positive outcomes for my group of students. In this reflection I was able to really stop and think about what skills I already had (bilingualism) and which skills I needed more practice with (differentiated instruction) and I was able to consider how I could use both skills and adjust them in a way that would help me meet the needs of my students.

The experience that I feel was most rewarding for me in becoming more competent with the elements found in standard 4 were the parent teacher conferences that I participated in and the translation and bilingual communication that I was able to facilitate and support both in spoken and written language for children and their caregivers. A major component of standard 4 is nurture and affection in supporting the learning and development of young children, and the adult-child relationships and interactions are the main sources of such nurture and affection. As I teacher I pride myself in getting to know each child and letting them know that I have a genuine interest in nurturing their learning and development. Furthermore, as a student teacher in both of my placements I have learned how important the nurture and support found in the child-caregiver relationship can be to a child’s learning and development. Many of the parents that attending the parent teacher conferences were very interested in being involved and supporting their child, but with language as a barrier I saw that each parent had concerns that they could not previously voice because they did not know how to access the bilingual supports in the school. Together with Mrs. C. I was able to elaborate and explain ways that the parents could help their children with their homework and provide them with strategies for helping their child practice their sight words at home. We were also able to enlighten the parents with tips on how to help their child complete their reading log by pointing out that in every homework packet that is sent home there is a bilingual reading selection, and if the parent can read it in Spanish and the child can practice reading it in English then the parent is supporting the child with their reading comprehension because even though the words are not spoken in the same language the message is still the same and the comprehension is just as important as the decoding of words.

Within each conference we were also able to remind parents of the bilingual supports within the school, even though Mrs. C. did not speak Spanish she wanted each parent to know that if they ever have questions or concerns that they can call in to the front office where the secretary is bilingual and can relay the message to Mrs. C., or they can write notes which Mrs. C. can then have translated by other bilingual staff. Being a part of the parent teacher conferences allowed me to gain experience in developmentally appropriate approaches to connecting with parents and families and providing them with the supports needed to help their children be successful.