Instruction Commentary

*In task 2: Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning, you will write a commentary, responding to the prompts below. Your commentary should be **no more than 6 single-spaced pages, including the prompts.***

1. *Which lesson or lessons are shown in the video clips? Identify the lesson(s) by lesson plan number.*

        Clip 1: **Lesson #1** - This 10 minute video clip is titled **SMART_Articles**

        Clip 2: **Lesson #3** - This 10 minute video clip is titled **Find_Someone_Who**

2. Promoting a Positive Learning Environment

In response to the prompt, refer to scenes in the video clips where you provided a positive learning environment.

*How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to students with varied needs and backgrounds, **and** challenge students to engage with learning?*

        Creating an exciting, yet safe, learning environment is essential for student growth in my classroom. Throughout all of my lessons, students are encouraged to openly communicate with me as well as their peers through anticipatory sets, guided learning activities, closure activities, and various forms of assessment.

        Establishing a strong rapport amongst students by supporting their learning and actively engaging them in conversation as well as providing a controlled and comfortable setting without fear has allowed me to continue challenging their intellectual abilities at differentiated levels in an environment that is conducive to learning.

        All students, whether they are learning English or have a classified disability, are encouraged to participate by myself and often by their peers. In the beginning of the school year I clearly established rules and expectations for class with a particular focus on activities that involve collaboration in small or whole group settings. Students in the class understand the boundaries, expectations, and consequences of their actions and uphold a high standard that I try to set through modeling each day. Throughout the clip there are examples of students openly communicating in a natural setting that produces humor that exemplifies how comfortable of a learning environment I try to sustain.

        In the second video clip titled *Find_Someone_Who*, students are shown working independently on an anticipatory activity as seen in assessment A3.1 that challenges students to collaborate by asking their peers for answers to provided questions and prompts. Students of all abilities can participate as the lesson is designed with differentiated questions. Activities such as *Find Someone Who* encourage students to speak with all students in the class as they are limited to answering 1-3 questions on their classmates' sheets depending on the size of the class. During this clip I am seen speaking with students who have classifications such as ADD, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder. Those students may be reminded to stay on task or be encouraged to participate by engaging their peers. There are also two foreign exchange students that are seen and both will actively participate in the clip by answering questions. One will provide me with the activity sheet to work from in the group discussion.

        During the first leg of the activity I can be seen engaging students who are requesting help and in the beginning I am also taking attendance at the teacher's station approximately 5 feet from the students. Activities like this in the beginning of the class that engage students in a positive environment allow me to take the electronic attendance within the school's policy and time limit after the bell rings to begin the period. Instead of losing instructional time, I can complete my responsibility while simultaneously monitoring a learning activity and the student environment.

Once the time limit is reached and students are asked to return to their seats the clip will show me choosing a student who has had success so that the most possible questions may be reviewed. Their peers will participate by answering the questions they signed off for and the slight "competitive" element will keep the activity fun. Students are aware that they may be asked to share answers but must make tradeoffs with their peers to have their own sheets signed so collaboration is a key element.

At the 5:34 mark (Find Someone Who) I am seen working with a student who is classified on the autism spectrum that has participated in the inclusive setting. The student is a high level student who often struggles with oral communication. The students are respectful of him and his challenges and treat him with the same respect and high expectations to encourage both of their learning experiences. I am able to help communicate his answers to the class if he is unable to clearly enunciate his words. In the video titled *SMART_Articles* I am seen offering the same type of support to the student at the 3:53 mark to promote participation.

In the clip titled *Find Someone Who*, I am seen providing immediate feedback and praise when students participate and offer correct answers. When incorrect or incomplete answers are given I provide an opportunity for students to collect their thoughts, rethink their responses, and try again as shown at the 6:43 mark when a student struggles to provide the correct response. Classmates are seen as willing collaborators that will assist in adding to answers. Students do not show any fear of providing incorrect responses that deter them from participating.

By reiterating and restating ideas or challenging students to elaborate with question and answer techniques in both clips I successfully encourage collaborative, spiraled learning and reinforce the idea that I am an active participant who listens to their answers and am also interested in learning more about their individual perspectives and thought processes.

3. Engaging Students in Learning
Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.
a. Explain how your instruction engaged students in
-Developing the skills of interpretation or analysis in relation to accounts of historical events or social studies phenomena.
-Building and supporting arguments.

In clip one titled *SMART_Articles* students are closing a lesson through a collaborative and interactive activity using the SMART Board. Students are asked to approach the front of the room and form a semi-circle as shown in effort to create a close-knit yet relaxed learning environment. The absence of a written or paper element allows students to focus on their thoughts and present them orally without the pressure of formulating written responses.

Using the Q-Chart (P1.1) as a platform for a differentiated questioning assessment session, I will be shown engaging students in conversation that requires them to use the information from the lesson to identify and match the terms on the left to the appropriate area designated by stars that represents responsibilities of the government or weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation. The Q-Chart is useful in developing differentiated questions to spiral the students' learning experience. After completing this step, I will ask students to apply their knowledge by analyzing various situations, using content based vocabulary, and interpreting the events and decisions of the Articles of Confederation from the perspectives of its creators.

Throughout the clip I am seen asking students to analyze information in various situations, both past and present, through their own perspectives in the modern world and the perspectives of colonists who lived through the era. Students will be asked to support their answers with evidence from the lesson and may be asked to provide examples at my discretion. At the 2:14 mark in *SMART_Articles* I model the expectation of the task and also perform a brief think aloud that exemplifies my thought process. There are several examples in both video clips that show me processing my thoughts aloud for students to follow.

At the 3:00 minute mark in video 1, a student analyzes the weakness of having one vote per state in decision making. In our conversation we continue to explain in detail why states of different sizes would feel differently about this concept. We also select and review key content vocabulary as a group as shown by the discussion about the term "representation" that follows.

b. Describe how your instruction linked students' prior academic learning and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning.

Continuing with video clip two, *SMART_Articles*, at the 2:40 minute mark engage the group after the student provides a correct response in a brief conversation about the purpose of taxing. The purpose of taxing under the Articles of Confederation is explained to me and then I provide students with a larger picture by asking them to evaluate the role of taxes in America today specifically citing examples seen throughout the local community.

In this video clip students must reference information from a previous unit that focused on the events leading to the Declaration of Independence and American Revolutionary War. At the 3:50 minute mark, one of the classified students in the section participates but does not orally communicate to his peers. His classmates are respectful and I continue the conversation uninterrupted by asking the group to relate the absence of an executive branch to previously learned knowledge. Students correctly respond by using a content based word, "tyrant", in their answer linking their knowledge of King George and the acts and taxes passed before the Declaration of Independence to the design of the Articles of Confederation.

At the 4:20 minute mark, a student incorrectly identifies a weakness of the Articles by stating the wrong vocab word in her answer. I guide the student and the class in a brief review of the content based vocabulary word "amend" by comparing it to the concept of passing laws. This direct application of vocabulary in real time settings helps students retain definitions and supports the use of the words in conversation. Earlier in the lesson students reviewed the difficulties and likely impossibility of all Americans unanimously agreeing on present issues in the country. The conversation led the group to realize real decisions and changes would be nearly impossible if everyone had to agree.

The lesson also provided the group with an authentic learning moment when one of the exchange students cites "no standard currency" as a weakness at the 5:45 mark in *SMART_Articles*. This allowed the class to further understand how someone would have difficulty trading or living in a new area if their money was not accepted by the native or local populations. I am able to call upon another foreign exchange student to reiterate the concept in an authentic scenario.

Throughout all of the lessons included in this learning segment students are constantly asked to recall previous information, predict future events and link ideas together as history is revealed to them through real-world scenarios.

4. Deepening Student Learning During Instruction
Refer to examples from the video clips in your explanation.
a. Explain how you elicited student responses that supported your students' ability to form interpretations or analyses of history/social studies sources and accounts and build arguments.

In the clip titled *SMART_Articles*, I frequently assess students through conversation using Pask's conversation theory. Conversational assessment allows me to elicit responses and inquire into the thought processes of the students. When they explain their answers I am also able to further assess their level of ability by asking them to analyze historical information in context of the time being studied and/or relate it to situations of the present day.

Although students often identified the powers and weaknesses correctly in the activity my questioning technique allowed me to prompt students to build arguments about their answers by explaining specific situations using critical thinking skills. My modeling of the task

through a think aloud showed at the 2:15 mark demonstrated to students the expectations and process of sharing a correct response with the class.

Throughout this activity students continued to analyze elements of government under the Articles of Confederation and built supporting arguments for their responses by citing historical or hypothetical examples with the support of myself and their classmates.

In the video clip titled *Find_Someone_Who*, students begin an activity that encourages collaboration and active engagement where they need to converse with their classmates to review answers to prompts based on class content. After a period of open collaboration, participants will provide answers in a forum to those tasks they signed off on as seen in assessment A3.1.

To answer the previous days' essential question, "What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?" students will relate their responses back to the Declaration of Independence and the Articles themselves when responding. The activity also serves as a preview for day three's target of learning about the compromises made during the Constitutional Convention that were directly influenced by such weaknesses.

Find Someone Who is an activity that also allows me to assess student knowledge through conversation. Again, using Pask's conversation theory, I am enabled to ask students to cite information from the Articles, Declaration of Independence, or even the Constitution when relevant in effort to link knowledge to sources.

To open the activity a student is asked to identify how many states are necessary to agree to amend an Article. After providing the answer, at the 5:00 mark I am able to also scaffold the task by adding the question of whether or not the answer is a weakness. The student agrees with me and I quickly remind the class that if everyone must agree amending the Articles is difficult. This quick analysis of information related to the text of the Articles encourages deeper understanding especially when related to authentic scenarios.

The prompts and questions written on the Find Someone Who are designed to encourage higher order thinking while remaining conscious of differentiation. At the 6:21 mark, a student is asked to analyze the events of Shay's Rebellion and link the effects to the shortcomings of the Articles of Confederation. The student correctly explains his argument by stating the lack of a national army opened the door for civilian rebellions. Historical and hypothetical examples are often expected to be given in conjunction with the students' response to support their answers.

b. Describe and cite examples from the clips of how you supported students in using evidence from sources to build and support arguments about historical events, a topic/theme, or social studies phenomenon.

In video clip one, *SMART_Articles*, I model connections made between historical documents and ideas for students and ask them to explain relations in a similar fashion using content based vocabulary found in sources and evidence from class.

According to Keene and Zimmermann there are three types of connections that can be built to enhance student comprehension - text to self, text to text, and text to world. Throughout the learning segment and video clip I will reference the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and begin introducing the United States Constitution. My modeling will show students how to link ideas together using content based vocabulary so that they may do the same when participating. Depending on the question being discussed I may also model or prompt students to draw upon one of the three different types of connections cited by Keene and Zimmermann.

The essential question, "What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?" is the focus of the lesson in the video. I begin by modeling an example (2:15 mark in *SMART_Articles*) and reiterate the source being the Articles of Confederation. My modeling will

demonstrate how I provide support for my answer as I explain to the class the need for conscription during times of conflict.

At the 2:47 mark in the video the first student correctly identifies the lack of power to tax as a weakness under the Articles. I am able to engage the student to demonstrate the validity of her response by adding examples that support her answer to enhance student understanding. As I scaffold information more examples provide evidence to support the argument and model the level of answer other students should strive for.

Throughout the activity I continue to refer back to specific elements of the Articles of Confederation that exemplify its weaknesses. The absence of federal power is related back to the concept of fear of tyranny established in previous lessons leading to the American Revolution. Students are challenged to relate past events to the decisions made when the Articles were constructed after the Revolutionary War ended. In the next lesson I will be guiding students as they link the weaknesses studied to the much improved United States Constitution. I will continue to refer back to previous sources such as the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation to draw relationships and comparisons.

5. Analyzing Teaching
Refer to examples from the video clips in your responses to the prompts.
a. What changes would you make to your instruction-for the whole class and/or for students who need greater support or challenge-to better support student learning of the central focus (e.g., missed opportunities)?

Executing a great lesson begins with great preparation. To begin, I believe reviewing the functionality and checking for any errors in the creation of SMART Lessons could have helped make this lesson stronger. By not testing each terms ability to fit into the correct box or forgetting to "lock" elements on the screen, students may have been distracted by pieces moving that should not have been allowed to as seen in *SMART_Articles* (example at 2:15 mark). In the instance of one term being rejected in the correct box, a student may become confused or be embarrassed even if I quickly reiterated their correct response and took responsibility for the mistake in the design. Immediately following this section I was able to fix the problems before conducting the lesson again throughout the day.

Aside from the technical elements, I believe planning more time to complete this assessment could be beneficial. Students showed a willingness to participate and actively engage in conversation. Students who have gaps in knowledge may be permitted to use class notes or be asked to take notes depending on their needs and learning styles. If a student is able to learn more from an authentic conversation then they would benefit more from speaking rather than writing and this lesson could be modified to accommodate both. In addition, more consistent and concrete referrals back to the Articles of Confederation through visual presentation or guided readings during conversations may be beneficial to students who are text-based or visual-based learners.

A graphic organizer could also be created for students to follow along with. In the event students are less willing to participate they could benefit from the construction of a paired table that could be completed during the conversation. The table would ask students to identify strengths, weaknesses, and responsibilities and provide one or more examples that support their reasoning. This would likely take more time to do as a full class unit and the lesson may be extended or overlapped into another class period to complete. The graphic organizer would also serve as a great study tool but may make it more difficult for students to focus on the main learning target of presenting oral discourse.

I think the lesson provides a lot of support for struggling learners in the environment it was presented in. The students in the class are supportive of one another and are willing to converse in a positive manner when their peers are struggling. It was rare to see any students

reluctant to ask for help or to even show embarrassment when they were struggling during the activity.

Providing a graphic organizer as previously mentioned may help students that have difficulty participating in social activities where they may become the focus of conversation. As the teacher I am conscious to do my best in identifying these students so that I may differentiate the amount of conversation I engage them in during group activities. In a pre-assessment given in week one, students were asked to rate their learning style and identify their learning strengths, weaknesses, and areas they sought improvement. By reviewing these in depth I could even utilize the co-teacher in the room to separate students who would like to participate in the SMART lesson from those who have significant gaps in knowledge and need more one-on-one attention or who prefer to work independently.

Due to the pace and nature of conversational informal assessment associated to the lesson I think creating a differentiated list of questions based on the Q-Chart (P1.1) would be beneficial. I could also make sure they are aimed at the learning target and draw upon current and relevant issues America is experiencing today. While I may not be using all of the questions from the chart it would be best to have a set that I could use at any moment to ask a differentiated and guided question from based on the student's ability. This could further reinforce the content of the lesson by linking it to current situations.

b. Why do you think these changes would improve student learning? Support your explanation with evidence of student learning and principles from theory and/or research.

As Gardener's research suggests, students have different learning styles. By providing different options to learn the information, students are more likely to remain engaged and perform to the best of their abilities. Intrapersonal learners such as the student who did not want to come forward during the SMART Lesson (5:40 mark) could benefit from independent work more even if I believe they are able to provide high level responses in discussion after I've reviewed their results from previous assessments. As previously mentioned, guided readings that reference concrete examples of weaknesses in the Articles could be beneficial for text-based and visual learners. By taking time to examine text closely and show students where shortcomings exist and are derived from, connections may be more easily comprehended. For students that work independently in the individual hierarchical quadrant, or who work best alone at their own pace, or for students that have gaps in knowledge, the graphic organizer component could help them develop knowledge of the standards in a less stressful environment.

The graphic organizer used in a whole-class setting or differentiated, co-taught environment would also be beneficial for chunking information. As Miller suggests, presenting smaller amounts of information at once may help students retain it. Sweller's cognitive load theory also suggests graphic organizers lesson the amount of stress when new information is presented. The visual transfer of information onto paper frees the working memory to continue learning and the graphic organizer serves as a tool students could review later on.

By taking time to create a set of possible questions using the Q-Chart (P1.1), I would be able to more easily spiral my questioning up or down depending on the ability the student is demonstrating at the time. Although I am able to create questions in the moment it would be helpful to have a set to choose from in the instance I'd like to ask something at a specific level. These questions would also be able to be transferred to other activities as well for differentiated instruction and assessment. Vygotsky's theory on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) supports this practice as I am spiraling information and techniques to help students work within their abilities to develop deeper connections to content. Having questions ready would also enable me to compare responses from one class to other sections and keep them consistent when tracking. I would also be able to review my own questions to ensure they are reliable, valid, and relevant.