

Sample Beginning Teacher Journal

Module 3: Instruction for Active Learning 7/20/12

Sample One- Grade 7 Mathematics

Beginning Teacher Journal

Use My Personal Journal to record specific and detailed information and examples related to your module work. Your Journal should include descriptions of such things as

- How you developed new learning, e.g., readings, conversations with your mentor and other colleagues, professional development activities;
- How you applied your new learning and what happened as a result,, e.g., how your practice changed, the impact on students; and
- Your ongoing analysis and reflection related to successes and continued challenges, cause and effect thinking, insights and /or concerns.

You will use the specific examples/evidence from your journal to help you determine if your professional growth plan is working or if it needs to be modified.

March 29, 2012

At the suggestion of Nora, I took a look at some of the sample module documents on the website. In both samples, the teachers picked a specific teaching goal. After reviewing these, I made some important observations. First, I noticed that when articulating a goal, both teachers picked a specific goal, such as increasing student engagement or differentiating instruction. They also picked a very specific skill or area of instruction, such as reading comprehension. Secondly, I noticed in both samples that the teachers discussed a text source that they consulted to inform their decisions and actions. Using researched-based strategies seems to be equally important as having classroom data to support this process.

I also looked at the CCT Performance Profile and thought about my placement on the continuum for each indicator. Indicators that stood out to me dealt with differentiation and varying student/teacher roles to develop independence. Both of these are issues that I have been struggling with this year. I have been trying to differentiate based on readiness, but struggling to figure out how to manage students working on different work. Specific struggles include how to grade different work, how to have students working on different things, how to have students accept different work, and how to replace assignments instead of having the students needing a challenge

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just do MORE work. I spend most of my time focusing on the whole class developing a skill and use a lot of whole class or individual instruction. This leaves me feeling spread thin because students are off-task during the whole class time and very needy during the individual time. I could probably structure this better and get students to do some of their own thinking.

After some more thought on which to choose and continuing to talk with Nora, I think that differentiation is the most important focus for me. One of the reasons that I have been struggling so much with differentiation is that when I give students that need a challenge harder material, they are very needy and ask so many questions that I can't manage all the groups doing different work. I think that I need to look at strategies for managing differentiation and I need to be sure I'm using the right strategies with the right students.

April 1, 2012

Nora and I met today to look at my goal and tweaked it to focus more on differentiation than on independence (I have been mixing two indicators together in my thinking to work on a goal). I have been struggling with differentiation all year and it makes a lot of sense to work on it now with multiple people supporting me rather than trying to do it alone. Also, it will set me up to be more successful with the new initiatives that are coming next year (SRBI, etc.). I have recognized the need to differentiate this year because I have had several students approach me to tell me that they are not being challenged. I have tried to respond by creating more difficult material, but found that they were needy when given a new and harder task and I had an incredibly difficult time managing the class when all the students needed me at once for different tasks. In addition, my toughest class is the one in which there is the biggest gap in ability. While I am good at recognizing needs for modifications, most of the time I have to try to make those on the spot, rather than in advance. Also, while I do know a lot of differentiation theory, I have not had a lot of success putting it into practice. Tiering is something that I think I am good at, but I do not know how to put it into practice without a lot of problems. Working on differentiation will be my new goal, with an intended outcome of increasing student achievement for students who are working on the lower end and challenging those students that need it.

April 7, 2012

I met with Nora, Mike, and Nancy yesterday to revise my goal and potential activities. Nora recommended making the goal more specific, which made a lot of sense to me since it was very vague. The goal itself reminds me a lot of a thesis question in how it needs to be very specific and measurable. It was very helpful to talk to Nora and work through this verbally. I feel like I have a better idea now of what I want to try and how I will get the support that I need. I also feel comfortable talking to her about my toughest class, without feeling like I am embarrassing myself.

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We talked about my goal, but also the resources I will need. I already have access to a lot of differentiation materials through the class I took and the research I did at UConn. I am planning to use Tomlinson's book and my own article as my main sources. I also have a lot of materials designed from the class I took that I can tweak to work in 7th grade. I realize that I have a lot of skill and understanding of HOW to differentiate in theory but it will be a challenge putting that into practice. I also had anticipated finding some way to use Marzano's strategies or an additional text source. I didn't find Marzano helpful with identifying differentiation strategies and I think I have enough information already. I would like to keep the scope of this manageable and I think that between Tomlinson and our work in the complexity article, I should be ok.

After looking at my CCT Performance Profile again, I noticed that I am on the low end of the spectrum for several indicators. I think that is normal for my level of experience and I think that the differentiation will support some of the others as well, such as varying strategies and building independence. Some of the others, like technology, will probably develop on their own as I gain more exposure. Also, I feel like differentiation is the most intimidating and the most important with SRBI coming up next year. It will be most beneficial to have Nora and others to support this growth, rather than trying to do it on my own.

I am already changing some of my learning activities as a result of this process. I am varying what I have students doing and also how I have them doing it. I am experimenting a lot and trying to figure out what I like, as well as get out of the "rut" I have been in – doing just one style of whole class guided instruction. At the same time, I am frustrated as I realize that the curriculum currently seems to be very procedurally based. We are not taking a lot of opportunities to delve into higher order thinking. Hopefully this is also something that may be addressed while working on the differentiation goal.

April 8, 2012

I ran in to talk to Nora today b/c I needed a quick answer about something. I want to get started on differentiating some materials next week when we begin solving equations. I think this is a topic that is easy to tier for me because I can easily change the type of numbers that students are working with. I was concerned because I had originally talked about giving students a survey that asked them about how they felt about their engagement, challenge level, etc. Without baseline data, I was worried that I couldn't get started. Nora helped me to realize that I already have this data or I wouldn't have chosen differentiation as my area for growth. I have class grades, but also a lot of student accounts. Sasha and Rayan have both come to me to say that they are not feeling challenged. Chris is working on pre-algebra material. Channon, Latasha, Ellie, and Khalid frequently tell me that they do not understand something. I have a lot of data right now and just need to take note of it. I also talked to my class today about the reasons

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for this. Some mentioned that they like to joke around and have fun, but Destiny's comment was the most revealing. She hesitated to say it, but when I asked her to say it respectfully, she told me that she was bored. Khalid also added to this, saying that sometimes when you don't understand something, you decide you can't do it, so you give up and have a conversation instead. I think they have finally articulated the gap that has been causing our problems all year. I have several students that need a challenge while others need remediation and there is such a huge gap that teaching just one way does not work. I am very hopeful that this is going to make a difference. Next steps are to continue tracking data, grades as well as observational and anecdotal. I will try to start with differentiation on Monday with solving equations. One question I have is how frequently I have to continue this. While I may not be able to do this every day, it may be interesting to notice the differences between days that I differentiate and days that I don't. I will also need to come up with some class norms for when students are working in different groups. Maybe we can do that tomorrow in class!

April 11, 2012

I gave a quiz to get some idea of where the students are with these math skills. Only six out of the 16 students achieved a 75% or above on the quiz. Hopefully, as I work to differentiate the lessons, most of the students will show improvement on the final quiz.

I developed some tiered assignments to start trying this week. The first time it took me a while to create it, but then when I wanted to create more tiered assignments for later content; it was much easier because I already had the template. I am going to try using the tiered assignments with period 6 and maybe 2 and 7. I don't want to overwhelm myself, but I also know that there are some upper level students in P 2 and 7 that could benefit from working with the challenge materials.

April 12, 2012

I used a 3-tier assignment today with relative success. This was the intro day of solving equations. It was a little rocky, but I guess that is to be expected with a new skill that requires so much in terms of notation. I think the kids will need more time or another individual problem next time before moving into groups. Either that, or they will become more independent when they get used to doing this more often. I am struggling with how to manage the "going over homework" aspect of these assignments, since they all have different answer keys. I'm not sure how to do that without it becoming a zoo while meeting all the kids' needs. One thing I did well, however, was to make it so that one problem is common on all three tiers. I think this will make it easier to go over for next time and I should probably repeat that. Since tomorrow is a shorter day, I think I will do a whole group activity using the white

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boards. This allows me to get data faster, and the kids write bigger and are more willing to make mistakes. I will return to a tiered activity on Thursday after the quiz. This should keep it manageable.

April 13, 2012

Yesterday was my first day differentiating and although it went well, it raised a lot of management concerns. I am used to going over the homework with students, but this is next to impossible if all students have different homework. It is also difficult to work with the neediest group because then the others don't have me to work with and their work is a bit harder. I think it may be difficult to use differentiation on the first day we are working with a skill. In talking with Nora about managing all this, some ideas for working with this in the future are to have the class work activities differentiated, while keeping the homework the same. Another idea is to make the homework multiple choice, with all of the answers being the same letter sequence for all the groups. To do this, students will need there to be a difference between class work and homework. They will need a short and manageable activity for class and another short and manageable activity for homework. What I tried for our next differentiated activity is to have the group activity on the front of the paper and the common activity on the back.

I believe that I need to address differentiation with the group, letting them know that I have grouped them according to the way they approach problems (structured, etc.) and filling them in on what differentiation is all about (Nora's idea). I can also give them a survey to get some feedback on how it is going for them. Also, I could change up the grouping strategies for management, having the lowest group start out individually while I work with the higher group, and then shift my attention. They would only be allowed to work in groups if they are quiet and working individually when I ask them to (Nora's idea). I also think we need to talk about group norms in order to make a change in this period 6 class.

April 14, 2012

While my kids worked on a quiz today, I collected their homework (1 addition and 1 subtraction equation), gave them some feedback and used the info to form groups for tomorrow. I think this is more an example of flexible groups than tiering. While I do have a tiered assignment, I think it will be more important to have the kids working on what they should be improving. So for instance, I might have a group working on notation with solving equations, while another group is good and ready to solve equations on their own.

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April 15, 2012

Yesterday, as students were taking their quizzes, I collected a 2 question homework assignment and used it as an assessment to figure out what areas students needed the most work on. I grouped the students based on these needs, thinking that they could all work on it together and support each other, but also that I could work with each group on those needs as I went around. I think the groupings were accurate and students responded well. There was **not** a lot of complaining about who they had to work with. I also came up with a class goal and individual group goals so that each group knew what they were supposed to be working on. I presented this to the class and was very up front with them about how I grouped them and what they were working on. While I think that this was all FABULOUS in theory, in practice it was not perfect, or even close. Even though the students were in groups, they don't have practice with this or the norms to know how to work together. Also, this was not really a "group worthy" (Nora's term) task. It was an individual skill and they were grouped together based on their goals, but that benefited me more than them. In the long run, they didn't really support each other that well. They worked at their own pace, and when I visited a group, it was like trying to answer 4 individuals at once, rather than a unit.

While this attempt did not go as perfectly as planned, I really liked the grouping and establishing of goals. I felt really confident about what students needed to work on and having that information justified the groupings. I also had a way to talk to each group and tell them what I saw and where they needed to go. I liked these conversations and I think the kids liked them too. It was also surprising to see that the groups did not end up being constructed in the way that I would have expected them to be. In several cases, students that I often think of as "struggling" were in the most advanced groups.

I do think that it was a good idea to have all students with the same homework, since it will be easy to go over tomorrow. Each time that I do a task where students are in groups, I think they get more used to the idea and are open to see what we will be doing next time.

April 16, 2012

After emailing and talking with Nora and Mike last Friday and getting their suggestions, I had students fill out a group reflection today and then facilitated a discussion about why we do group work and what students need from each other to work collaboratively. I was surprised to see how insightful students were and they came up with some really good ideas. I plan to represent their overall ideas tomorrow before we break into groups. I have also designed the group work so that it will hopefully hold them accountable to each other. They will be preparing each other for a one question quiz and I will award bonus points to groups who have both of their

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members successful. Hopefully this will encourage collaboration!

April 27, 2012

I worked with all the math 7 classes yesterday on a group reflection. I asked them to identify why we work in groups and also what they needed from a group in order to work collaboratively. I think this was a very beneficial conversation and I would like to have it again next year – probably VERY early on. That way I could establish group norms from the beginning and make them an expectation they learn. I was surprised at how articulate students could be about both why and how to use groups.

I think the piece about accountability is the most important. Students will do better if they are accountable for their work and I think it will also make things fair for all.. I grouped the kids together today based on their exit slip from yesterday. I really like how that is working. It changes up the groupings and they usually seem to work out well. I am still considering personalities to some extent, but I like having them work with different people. I saw some really good interactions today. I had students talking through the problems and really collaborating. They would talk about what they were doing and why. They would notice if their partner made a mistake and point out what they needed to do differently. I think one thing that might even increase this interaction would be to make it so that the pairs only have 1 sheet of paper. That way they would both focus on working together, rather than trying to work individually. There was also some “parallel sandbox play”, where two students worked on their own papers and didn’t really interact at all. I’m not sure that the groups were completely beneficial for all, but there were some instances where a student said that they understood it better because of someone else. I think that benefits BOTH students because the one that explained has a heightened self-esteem because they affected such a change. I am definitely learning a lot about grouping, so even if it doesn’t make big changes this year, I think it will impact how I teach in the future and what I am comfortable doing and trying. If anything, this process is giving me the confidence to experiment with things in my teaching.

One thing that is difficult is that students are still struggling with a lot of the fundamentals of solving equations. It is such a difficult tug of war because you don’t want to spend too much time and have them be bored, but this is also new for all of them. I think I need to do some re-teaching and continued support that perhaps they will not be able to get from their peers. Differentiation is not just about grouping, but also about responding to student needs. I think I am getting a lot better at identifying those needs and also at using assessment data.

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April 30, 2012

I haven't done any further group work since Tuesday, but the Q & A sheet I made seemed to help students by responding to their questions. I think they respected the fact that I was willing to address their questions, rather than just saying "do it my way." There are still several students who are not showing the correct notation, but several others are finally getting it.

I have also been using more engagement strategies, such as using white boards and having kids come up to the big board. While it is difficult to have multiple students at the board because others talk, it is usually during this time that I get the most out of kids. They usually reveal that they don't know something and we get a chance to work it out. I don't know why they seem to think better with a marker in their hand than an eraser, but maybe because it is less permanent? I have been finding that these engagement strategies seem to give me a lot of quick assessment data and also get more students working for longer periods of time. I started varying my strategies at the beginning of this TEAM process when I was working through the CCT Performance Profile and realized that that was an area that I needed to improve on.

One thing I am considering is setting up some students as "experts." Nora pointed out that in Tomlinson's book, she presents the idea of experts to help manage differentiation. The book says you can have students show their work to an expert, who would decide whether or not the work is complete and correct. This would be very helpful because the notation we are working on is very intense and it would be helpful to have a second pair of eyes to help me out. On the other hand, I don't want to create conflict or peer status issues. I could ask students to check their partner's work, but at the same time, if there is no accountability, that will not work.

Another idea I have is to shorten the time the students are spending in groups, especially for my tougher class. I think the groups are a good idea, and I like the idea of differentiating by readiness, but I think they lose control because there is no immediate accountability and they have too much time to goof off. I think I may have each group work on one problem on a white board and then have that group present their work to the class. I will only give them about 3-5 minutes to work and then present. Since most students are in good shape at this point, I should only need to work intensively with the lowest groups during this time. Alternatively, I could also put someone who is almost an expert in one of these groups to lead them along?

May 4, 2012

I tried shortening the amount of time students spent in their groups and that seemed to be somewhat helpful for keeping students on task. I was able to differentiate quickly on that day as well, choosing the problem based on the group's ability, but I didn't really

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spend as much time on the groups as I could have. I also tried to keep the groups accountable by having them present their material to the class. I think this was a good idea in theory, but the students would have been more successful if they knew what they were supposed to say. Two students just went up and wrote, not explaining anything that they did. This would be more effective if we had a document camera and they showed their work and then had some talking points. That way, they would spend less time showing their work and more time talking about it. I also wonder if having a document camera might motivate students to write more neatly so they could show it to others. At the same time, they really like to come up to the board, so that might lose some of the momentum I get there.

My students seem to be getting more comfortable with the idea of groups and are moving into them easily. They don't complain a lot about their partners and seem to know that the groups are not permanent. At the same time, there is still a lot of "parallel play". The students are not consulting each other, but are still asking me questions even when their partner knows the answer. Some are getting really good at working in groups, but I guess I just need to keep forcing this, by not answering questions and by providing group worthy tasks.

I am having a hard time with tiered and group activities because we keep doing topics that students need so much support on. We are either introducing new material or the needs are so severe that groups don't seem to help. It seems like they should help, but in reality, it ends up feeling like they run interference with the main objective, which is improvement in a skill. Instead of kids supporting each other, it's as though they distract each other so I don't seem to be able to help them as much. It seems like they are less focused on their own skills on group days, but maybe this is just a feeling that comes with my continued discomfort with group work.

On the first day I teach a skill, it is difficult to break up the groups and give the kind of attention that the lowest groups need. Yet I can clearly see that they need this. And it feels like we are always building and doing a new skill, so how do I break up into groups ever? There definitely needs to be some degree of me walking students through new things before they go into the groups...but where is that line?

May 5, 2012

Accountability seems to be very important, both in producing better student behavior and outcomes and in providing me with assessment information. When I make an assignment due at the end of class, rather than having it be one long assignment that is due the next day, students seem to be more productive (or at least most of them). To that end, I am starting to make more separate

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assignments, where students have to produce something by the end of class and also work on something short at home.

I am also trying to be sure that I am on track with my PGAP. To do that, I have tiered another assignment for tomorrow, and also made a choice board for later in the week. I have an additional activity also planned for this week that will have mixed ability grouping. For the tiered assignment, students will work on different class work, but will all have the same homework. During the class, I will have some additional support, so I can work intensively with the lowest group and still have someone to support the other groups as well. The lowest group has their problems grouped by type of problem, has relatively easy math facts, and has only one with negative numbers that will come at the end. This way, I can focus on the process and not have as many interfering variables. For the medium group, the problems are mixed up and there are two problems that involve integers. For the highest group, there is an additional problem, mixed order, integers, and a problem where the answer creates a -1 in the check step, which confuses some of them. I created these tiers by adding facets at each level that the students have to attend to.

The only concern I have is that by having different problems, this will be hard for me to manage. Also, I don't really want students working together on this assignment. I did group them, but I want them grouped only to figure out which tier they are working on. After that, it is just easier for me if they are near each other when they are working on the same assignment. I think to make this work, I need to present this as individual work and explain that they are only sitting near each other to help me organize their work.

During my conversation with Nora last week, we talked about all of this, but also how everything I am doing is teaching me about instruction. For instance, I am learning that in order to have good instruction, you have to have strong assessment. When you have good instruction and there is accountability, all these factors seem to support classroom behavior. All the modules seem to blend together.

May 6, 2012

Today was my first really successful attempt at tiering. I tiered the assignments by altering the number of facets, following the process in our differentiation article. The lowest group had 5 problems, with similar types grouped together, "friendly" calculations, and few integers. The middle group had a few more facets to attend to. Their problems were mixed by types, had some harder calculations, and 1 problem with negative numbers. The challenge group had an extra problem because they work faster, mixed types of problems, and several negative numbers (and one fraction) to work with. The assignments seemed well-matched to the groups, which were designed based on an assignment the students completed last week. The only problem I saw was that the assignment was

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last Thursday and this was a bit too long between assessment and activity (couldn't be avoided).

I made a few decisions for this activity that ultimately made it work very well. First, I decided to increase accountability by having both a class work assignment that I collected and a homework assignment. I also chose to have the students work independently. I had them group according to the symbol (tier) they were working on, but work on their own. This allowed them to focus on the activity instead of socializing. The activity was not really "group worthy", so choosing to have students work independently was the best choice for today. I also had help in 3 out of 4 classes, which definitely facilitated the management, since I was able to work intensively with the lowest group that needed it.

Some things that came up during my meetings w/ Nora and Nancy (today and last week)...

I did use flexible grouping with this, but did not have students work in groups. I think I started off thinking that the two had to go together, but then realized that sometimes they have to be separate. Tiering happens by having different groups of students work on different levels of assignments. There are multiple students at each tier and you should use assessment to inform which level students are at. You should have this be flexible so that students are always being challenged, not just staying stagnant at their current level. This being said, it doesn't mean that these flexible groups have to be collaborative. From the other angle, if groups are flexible, this doesn't mean that they have to be tiered. In fact, you can have mixed ability groups or any other kind that you want.

Throughout this process, I think it has been very important that there is permission to experiment. Normally, it is very difficult to take chances at school. Everyone is stuck in what "we always do". If you do something different, there are no other models to follow. Also, if it fails, they kind of have this "I told you so" attitude. Now, I am forced to experiment and have support along the way. If it doesn't work, there is someone to work with me on how to fix it and what to do differently next time. Each failure ends up informing the next time. I think the reflection piece is also helpful, because it forces you to acknowledge both the strengths and weaknesses/areas needing improvement in the day/lesson.

May 7, 2012

I talked to Nora about a draft for my choice board I am developing. Choice boards are one of the last ways I want to try to differentiate during this series of lessons. She gave me a model from LA as a resource and gave me some great suggestions today about to make my ideas manageable for my students. She especially talked about how I might incorporate higher-order thinking into the choice board assignment. In planning for the choice board assignment I also drew on what I learned from Tomlinson's book about

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picking objectives I wanted the kids to meet and then finding different ways of having them meet those objectives that would be their choices. I'm also going to observe Nora using choice boards in her class.

May 10, 2012

After observing Nora use choice boards, I've been able to finalize my plans. I have created a choice board with four skills that are essential when solving equations: vocabulary, solving an equation, checking an answer and writing a story problem. Students will have a choice of 2-3 options. There will be nine squares and students will pick three in a row. I have the tasks arranged so that all students have to meet a least 3 of the objectives. I'll be using this activity with the students tomorrow.

May 11, 2012

Students used the choice boards today. I really think they enjoyed them and they were beneficial to all levels of students. The kids started the activity quickly and stayed focused. When I went around the room and checked their work, most of them were able to do the activities without my help. Those that struggled were few and a little prompting from me moved them along. Overall, it looks like the majority of the students were able to successfully complete their tasks. I will check the work more thoroughly tonight to see if my initial observations are correct.

May 14, 2012

I met with Nora today to begin pulling together my thoughts and information for my reflection paper. She said to be sure to go back to my journal and pull out significant learning points for me as I went through the process. She also wants me to be sure I'm specific in describing what I learned, how the students did, etc. I feel that my journal is fairly comprehensive, so this shouldn't be a problem, plus I will also look again at the CCT Profile and at my log entries for things I can use in "fleshing" out my thoughts.

I want to be sure to include the actual ways I implemented tiering, grouping and choice boards and how those worked with the students. I need to be sure to show not only what I learned about myself but what impact that had on the students. I particularly want to show how I continued to adjust my teaching based on student learning.

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May 19, 2012

Sent my first draft of my reflection paper to Nora and also asked Nancy and Mike to take a quick look. I realized, while I was putting it together, that I did learn quite a bit about differentiation and also about planning lessons based on assessment data I had collected. This has helped meet the needs of individual students more specifically and it also allows for adjustments in lessons.

In terms of looking at assessment data, Nora reminded me that I needed to include the data on my students' final quiz. I almost forgot! I'm pleased with their progress and believe that the work with differentiation helped increase their achievement. 12 out of the 16 students had a score of 75% or higher on the test; only six of these students reached this goal for the first quiz. Also, significant was that 10 students improved their scores by at least a full letter grade.

May 24, 2012

Nora and I met to go over my final revisions to my paper. She asked me to give more information about student learning and more specific details about what actually happened in the classroom. Overall, she felt like I was right on track and adding a little more detail would make it complete. I intend to fine tune the paper over the next couple days, have Nora review one more time and then submit it!