



## What Makes This TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

Some specific examples/evidence that contributed to the success of this paper are provided below.

Module Two: Online. Planning

Grade: 9

Subject: English

### **Criteria I: Development of New Learning (*How the teacher developed new learning and what was learned*)**

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Collaborated with mentor about the results of Common Formative Assessments
- Analyzed a student learning styles inventory
- Read *Good Instruction as a Basis for Differentiated Teaching* by Carol Ann Tomlinson and *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement* by Robert Marzano

What the teacher learned:

- “My reading on differentiation also pointed out how important it is to determine students’ prior knowledge; it’s one of the first steps in planning for differentiating -- finding out what students already know or don’t know.”
- “I read that by using diverse instructional processes, I can help all of my students access the same content and learning, but in different ways. I can also differentiate by products based on students’ readiness levels, interests and learning preferences.”
- “My mentor helped me understand that I needed to be clear in my own mind about what I wanted my students to learn before I could begin planning the activities or products.”
- “I shared with my mentor that vocabulary was something I had also discussed with the literacy coach. He agreed with me that an understanding of vocabulary played a key role in text comprehension. He also explained that students need to make meaning of words through their own images and actions. He suggested that I think of a variety of ways that students could interact with vocabulary terms, e.g., talking, writing, graphically representing, using organizers, etc.”

### **Criteria II: Impact on Practice (*How the teacher’s planning practice is different*)**

- “I identified four learning goals for the unit; all students will: 1.) know the main events, conflicts and characters in the story; 2.) identify and discuss two major themes of the novel; 3.) analyze how at least two characters’ lives were changed by events in the story; 4.) evaluate Atticus Finch's reasons for defending Tom Robinson and the effects his decision has on him, his family and the community.”
- “I thought carefully about how I would group students as a differentiating tool and decided to base work groups on two criteria: the learning style inventory and the CFA scores. I wanted students of similar ability to work with one another so that I would be able to closely monitor their progress in comprehending the reading and thus, when necessary, be able to step in with extra support.”
- “Since groups 1 and 2 will need assistance with completing their reading of chapter one, I will guide their reading and provide an audio reading of the text for them to listen to as they follow along in their books.”
- “I will have them illustrate the setting using the words of the text to guide their drawings. This will tap into their artistic intelligence. As a whole class, the students will share their work.”

### **Criteria III: Impact on Students (*How the teacher anticipated student performance/learning will improve as a result of changes in the teacher’s practice*)**

- “My hope is that not only will students become comfortable with key vocabulary words but this will also help to focus them on the two main issues in this novel.”
- “Differentiating these activities will allow me to help students access the chapter and demonstrate their understanding by creating different products. The whole class will benefit from the class discussion.”
- “By getting the students to look more closely at character development, they should be ready to analyze other characters in the story as we read the novel.”
- “Given a list of new vocabulary words that they will encounter in the novel, they will continue the conversation on the two words justice and prejudice by discussing the new words, using a dictionary to define words if necessary, and associating the meaning of the new words with either justice or prejudice.”
- “They will also create questions for discussion based on an abbreviated Bloom’s Taxonomy. Previously, we have worked with understanding and creating QARs; we then talked about Bloom and how important it was to pose higher level questions. So far, I have been the one to create the questions and have told the students what levels they were on the Taxonomy. I think these students are ready to create their own questions.”

**Indicator:** 1. Teachers plan instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by: Determining students' prior knowledge to ensure that content instruction is at an appropriate level of challenge and differentiated to meet their learning needs.

**Goal:**

I will learn three ways to differentiate instruction and use that knowledge to plan a series of lessons within a unit of instruction where I use differentiation strategies to help students in my ninth grade class improve their reading comprehension skills when we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**Initial Summary:**

As my mentor and I reviewed the CCT Performance Profile, I began to realize that I have been directing my instruction to the whole class. We talked about the individual students and their specific learning needs. My mentor reminded me that I had given students an Interest Inventory and Learning Styles assessment in the beginning of the year. I recognized that I do not consistently use my knowledge of students to plan instruction. I rarely plan differentiated instruction that will not only help my low achieving students to be more successful but will also challenge my higher achieving students. My current practice includes mostly whole class lessons. I do sometimes allow students to choose activities but they are not purposefully designed based on the range of students' skills. I may differentiate instruction when I am teaching a lesson and see that some students are having difficulty but I do not plan those modifications beforehand.

**Reflection Paper:**

I began the module with an analysis of my daily teaching practice through the CCT Performance Profile on Planning for Active Learning. It became clear as I discussed the analysis with my mentor that I am not proactive in planning lessons that meet the varied needs of my learners (indicator 1 in the CCT profile). I realized that I had been directing my instruction to the whole class. My mentor and I talked about the individual students and their learning needs. She reminded me that I had given students an Interest Inventory and a Learning Styles assessment in the beginning of the year. When asked how I have used that information to design my lessons, I wasn't able to provide many examples.

Related to planning for differentiation, I also determined that I needed to better utilize assessment data in planning lessons and as a basis for differentiation especially in terms of interventions for my struggling students (indicator 4). My mentor and I reviewed the results of the recent Common Formative Assessment in reading given by the English department. CFA results revealed that not all of my students effectively comprehend what they read. In my ninth grade class, twelve students scored significantly above proficiency on the assessment, eight scored just barely proficient and six students did not meet the proficiency expectations. The six struggling students have weaker vocabularies which contribute to their lower comprehension

skills; they struggle with the material and easily become frustrated.

The combination of my frustration with my students' lack of progress in reading comprehension, the CFA data on the range of achievement in comprehension and my realization as I completed the CCT Profile that I wasn't differentiating to meet the diverse needs of my students led me to explore and then plan strategies for differentiation in my classroom. I began by reading *Good Instruction as a Basis for Differentiated Teaching* by Tomlinson. I learned that planning should begin with the students and not the curriculum. This meant that I needed to determine what the essential concepts, principles and skills were that my students needed to know at the end of the unit on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. According to Tomlinson, teachers can differentiate learning in three areas- content, process and product based on the ability levels, learning styles and interests of their students. Differentiating content appeared to be the most difficult and I decided that it was not the best place for me to start. I read that by using diverse instructional processes, I can help all of my students access the same content and learning, but in different ways. I can also differentiate by products based on students' readiness levels, interests and learning preferences. (Tomlinson, 2001). I knew what many of my students' learning styles and interests are since they completed a Learning Style Survey and an Interest Inventory at the beginning of the year. I needed to purposefully use this assessment information as well as the CFA results to plan for teaching.

My mentor and I discussed how I might use what I had learned about differentiation and the CFA results in the planning process. Since I had data on my students' varying achievement levels as a result of the CFA, we decided that grouping might be an effective way to differentiate. Additionally, I needed to think of different strategies or activities geared to students' needs. We also discussed some ways that I could differentiate the product. I determined that I needed to do some further research to see what types of products I could use. My mentor helped me understand that I needed to be clear in my own mind about what I wanted my students to learn before I could begin planning the activities or products. We agreed that I would work on this before our next meeting and that I would also bring some suggestions for different activities and products.

I identified four learning goals for the unit; all students will: 1.) know the main events, conflicts and characters in the story; 2.) identify and discuss two major themes of the novel; 3.) analyze how at least two characters' lives were changed by events in the story; 4.) evaluate Atticus Finch's reasons for defending Tom Robinson and the effects his decision has on him, his family and the community. With these learning goals as my springboard, I began to apply what I have learned about differentiation to plan lessons that will meet the needs of all my students. My planning began by focusing on the introduction and the first chapters of the novel.

I thought carefully about how I would group students as a differentiating tool and decided to base work groups on two criteria: the learning style inventory and the CFA scores. I wanted students of similar ability to work with one another so that I would be able to closely monitor their progress in comprehending the reading and thus, when necessary, be able to step in with extra support. I would also differentiate activities and products for the different learners. Groups 1 and 2 each included the three students who scored lowest on the CFA and two students who scored just barely proficient. Most of these students identified themselves as visual learners and tended to be interested in music and art. Group 3 included the four students

who scored barely proficient and one student who scored slightly higher, but still needs added support. Groups 4 and 5 included the remaining students who scored above proficient. These students enjoy discussions and being challenged. My main concern was to design a plan that included ways of engaging students in high level tasks that focus on the essential learning for *all* of the students.

I talked with my mentor about the goals for the unit and how I might start the unit with the theme statements. As a result of her prompting, I recognized that I was “giving” the learning to the students. I had to find ways for them to develop their own understanding. I discussed my concern about the difficulty of the text and realized that vocabulary would be the first hurdle. I needed to get students to understand the story but they needed to be able to read it. We talked about different ways to introduce the vocabulary. I shared with my mentor that vocabulary was something I had also discussed with the literacy coach. He agreed with me that an understanding of vocabulary played a key role in text comprehension. He also explained that students need to make meaning of words through their own images and actions. He suggested that I think of a variety of ways that students could interact with vocabulary terms, e.g., talking, writing, graphically representing, using organizers, etc. My mentor suggested that a good way to introduce theme might be by having students associate the vocabulary with the themes that would be discussed. This would also align with what the literacy coach had said about having students actively engage with the words. I already knew what vocabulary words I was going to teach so this sounded like a good idea.

I felt we had done well in planning the vocabulary work but my mentor further challenged me by asking if all of my students needed the same instruction for the vocabulary. I wasn't sure. Perhaps the best way to be sure would be to do a pre-assessment. A word/idea free association activity might be the pre-assessment. I had observed my mentor implementing this with her students and was impressed with its success. We agreed that this would be a good place to begin. My reading on differentiation also pointed out how important it is to determine students' prior knowledge; it's one of the first steps in planning for differentiating - - finding out what students already know or don't know. My mentor also asked how I would proceed with the lesson based on student responses. I needed to be proactive as to how I would provide for students who were not successful with the pre-assessment activity.

In the first lesson, students will develop an understanding of key vocabulary in the novel. Students, in their assigned groups, will be connecting their own knowledge and experience to the text by free associating words and ideas related to prejudice and justice, two key themes of the novel. As they read, students will be asked to write down words, phrases or quotes in their reading logs that can be associated with either word. Then students will share their lists in their groups. Next, given a list of new vocabulary words that they will encounter in the novel, they will continue the conversation on the two words justice and prejudice by discussing the new words, using a dictionary to define words if necessary, and associating the meaning of the new words with either justice or prejudice. My hope is that not only will students become comfortable with key vocabulary words but this will also help to focus them on the two main issues in this novel.

If this pre-assessment activity shows that some students need more work with the vocabulary, I have planned to further differentiate by having those students complete an activity with

sentences from the text that include the new vocabulary words. Using the dictionary definitions, they will discuss in their groups the meaning of the sentences. They will then determine if the word/sentences associate with prejudice or justice. While struggling students are continuing their work with vocabulary, the other groups will engage in the activity “Quote Finder.” They will find two to three quotes to read to each other that they find interesting, well written, confusing, powerful or surprising. Once they have read the quote to their group mates, they will explain why they chose that quote. At the end of the lesson, all students will complete an exit slip that asks them to write down what is justice and what is prejudice. They will also be asked to consider how this lesson helped them better understand these two ideas. Additionally, they will be asked to predict what the novel will be about.

The next lesson will focus on understanding the first chapter and beginning to interpret the text. Since groups 3, 4 and 5 will have already read the chapter, they will be asked to come up with a title for the first chapter and explain why the title fits the chapter. They will also create questions for discussion based on an abbreviated Bloom’s Taxonomy. Previously, we have worked with understanding and creating QARs; we then talked about Bloom and how important it was to pose higher level questions. So far, I have been the one to create the questions and have told the students what levels they were on the Taxonomy. I think these students are ready to create their own questions. To support them in this activity, I will provide a sheet with sentence starters for questions of comparison, inference, analysis and evaluation. Since groups 1 and 2 will need assistance with completing their reading of chapter one, I will guide their reading and provide an audio reading of the text for them to listen to as they follow along in their books. I will have them illustrate the setting using the words of the text to guide their drawings. This will tap into their artistic intelligence. As a whole class, the students will share their work. The whole class will engage in a discussion about title choices; the illustrations of the setting will be discussed and compared to one another and to the suggested titles. Groups three, four and five will choose one of their questions to lead the whole group in a short discussion. We will use one or two of their other questions for a journal response for homework. Differentiating these activities will allow me to help students access the chapter and demonstrate their understanding by creating different products. The whole class will benefit from the class discussion.

The third lesson will focus on character development by taking a close look at the character of Boo Radley who was introduced in Chapter 1. To help students understand this character, I will differentiate the process and products for the groups. Groups 1 and 2 will focus on completing a character trait graphic organizer. These students need to identify basic traits before they will be able to draw conclusions about the character. The other groups will focus more on doing a close reading of the chapter to see how the author’s descriptions of Boo help us to see what the neighborhood is like. They will locate specific quotes and decide what the quotes tell us about the neighbors and their attitudes. They will also read a short article about urban myths and apply that information to the characterization of Boo. Groups 1 and 2 will answer the questions- *What are Boo Radley’s characteristics? What image do you get of him based on the descriptions? How does the text shape our view of the real Boo Radley?* They will then sketch Boo Radley and provide specific quotes that correspond to their illustration. Finally, the groups will share their information. I will facilitate the discussion to help all of the students join their information together to draw some conclusions about what happened to Boo and what his

character tells us about the people of Maycomb. By getting the students to look more closely at character development, they should be ready to analyze other characters in the story as we read the novel.

As I reflect on my work during this module, I have come to several conclusions which have directly impacted my understanding of planning for active learning. Planning is not just about the curriculum or content. It is about knowing one's students, who they are in terms of their ability levels but also their interests and learning styles. Differentiation means planning lessons by varying approaches to content, process and/or product in response to students' different learning needs. Anticipating potential challenges and being prepared to address them are important considerations in the planning phase. I originally had specific knowledge about student needs and interests and attempted to help students as I taught lessons but didn't plan based on that knowledge. In fact, as I review my initial self-assessment using the CCT Performance Profile, I realize that it probably would have been more accurate to say that my instructional plans were generally not differentiated to meet student learning needs. Clearly, I initially had concerns about student learning but not a well defined plan of intervention. As I applied new learning from this module, I have begun to learn to plan by analyzing student performance (CFA results) and using knowledge of individual learning needs (interest inventory and learning styles) so that all students are supported in reaching the learning goals. I've sought to include a variety of strategies to address student learning differences, including differentiation of processes for developing understanding (grouping, listening versus reading) and products (charts, illustrations) for students to exhibit their learning. I have been proactive in planning differentiated instruction for students who do not respond to primary instruction. I have moved beyond my initial understanding of planning to a deeper understanding of what effective planning means. I have changed in my approach to planning and need to take my new learning and apply it on a consistent basis as I plan for all students to successfully access learning goals. I will continue my work on differentiation as I plan the rest of the lessons for this unit and eventually, for use in all my lesson planning.