



What Makes this TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

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

Module Three: Instruction

Grade: 2

Subject: Literacy

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

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Established a book club for teachers and read *Growing Readers* by Kathy Collins
- Mentor and two Reader's Workshop specialists observed lesson and provided feedback
- Observed a colleague's Reader's Workshop lesson

What the teacher learned:

- "I learned that student to student discourse is crucial for increasing student engagement and curiosity. It also allows students time to formulate their thinking and practice the concept or skill, which leads to higher quality responses."
- "I gained insight into how to further increase partner talk through the 'turn and talk' strategy. I learned that this strategy allows students to practice the concept I modeled in a safe, engaging conversation with a peer."
- "I absorbed many things while observing, but perhaps the most significant piece of knowledge gained was the importance of high quality, explicit modeling during a ten-minute mini lesson. This led me to believe that communicating a clear, concise purpose to the mini-lesson was critical."

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

- "My teaching was first impacted when I decreased the amount of time I spent talking. I reduced the time from 16-19 minutes to 8-11 minutes ... To remain focused and limit my speaking, I began to chart my mini lessons out on the easel ... My easel included highlighted vocabulary I wanted my students to learn, as well as bullet points for specific strategy application ... On my easel, I had the title 'Reading Using Punctuation.' Underneath, I had bullets that included, 'You change the tone of your voice based on the punctuation mark.'"
- "... I clearly communicated the role of students during my modeling ... I asked that students 'watch and listen to me as I read through this big book. I want you to be listening detectives for when my tone changes and pay attention to what punctuation mark went with it.'"
- "I asked students to 'turn and talk' about a time my expression changed based on the punctuation mark. I modeled for students how I would respond to this question by saying, 'Miss K's voice was very questioning when she read that sentence that ended with a punctuation mark.'"

Criteria III: Impact on students (*How student performance/learning improved as a result of changes in practice*)

- "As each group performed their plays, students listened intently for fluency ... students turned to talk with a partner about that group's fluency strengths and areas for improvement ... One partnership engaged in the following conversation: (Student 1): 'I think strength was that they paused just the right amount of time with punctuation marks. Something they could work on is adding in more character tone.' (Student 2): 'I think so too! I think that they could have used an angrier tone for the troll when he stopped that last billy goat.' I also observed partnerships paying each other compliments that include, 'Wow! What great thinking!'"
- "Perhaps the greatest impact I saw on my students' learning is in the quality of their 'stop and jot' responses. After using these new instructional strategies for about three weeks, 81% of my students had a score of an eight on their 'stop and jot' using the nine-point rubric. Zero percent of students scored below a 5. [At the beginning of the module, 10% of students scored a zero, 5% scored a one, 32% scored a two, 16% scored a three, 26% scored a four, and 11% scored a five.]"

Indicator : 4. Teachers implement instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about world at large by: leading students to construct meaning through the use of active learning strategies such as purposeful discourse and/or inquiry-based learning.

Goal:

I will learn and implement active instructional strategies that will encourage more meaningful student discourse during Reader's Workshop lessons. By increasing student to student discourse, students will not only be more actively engaged in and curious about each lesson but they will also be more likely to apply the strategies to their learning during their independent practice. In addition, having student to student discourse will encourage all students to formulate and share their learning, thus improving the quality of their responses.

Initial Summary:

Upon reflecting on my teaching and the conversations that have been generated this year, I have found that they are mostly teacher directed, particularly in our newest method of literacy instruction: Reader's Workshop. My mini-lessons drag way beyond the five-ten minute limit. I am talking for fifteen-twenty minutes at the students about a new reading strategy or skill. For example, on October 8, I spoke for sixteen minutes about story elements and modeled how to discuss a setting. During this time, students sat quietly. Three of my students were distracted and needed several reminders to focus. I asked some open-ended questions; however, the discourse was solely between teacher and student. I am not allowing them the opportunity to have student to student discourse. I have also found that when I perform closure after their independent practice of the skill learned during the mini lesson that it is not substantial or meaningful to them. Their learning seems to be on the surface currently in this area. I believe that changing my instructional strategies during the mini lessons could significantly impact student engagement, quality of discourse, and lead to greater independence.

Reflection Paper:

At the beginning of this school year, my grade decided to adopt the Reader's Workshop model as our mode of literacy instruction. Since I had no experience with this method of teaching, I had little information in how to instruct my students through this mode. After receiving information on how to teach Reader's Workshop, I began with enthusiasm. As I progressed through each mini lesson, I noticed how much time I spent talking and how little my students spoke. One day, I timed myself and discovered I spoke for over sixteen minutes, which is well above the five-ten minute guideline. I also took notice of how little my students participated in my lesson. Fewer than four of my twenty-one students raised their hands to participate in the discussion. To conclude that lesson, I had students complete a "stop and jot" response sheet in which they had to answer the question, "What was the problem in your story? What was the solution?" I scored these responses with a nine-point rubric that evaluated their comprehension and application of the concept. I found that 10% of my class scored a zero, 5% scored a one, 32% scored a two, 16% scored a three, 26% scored a four, and 11% scored a five. No students scored above a five. Many responses included the words, "I don't remember." These low quality responses were a big surprise for me. I had expected students to be producing responses that were detailed, accurate, and reflective of the mini lesson.

After contemplating this lesson and the student responses, I saw the connection between my lengthy teacher directed lessons, low student engagement, and the poor application of concepts during independent practice. I realized my students weren't learning as many of the literacy skills and concepts as they could be because I spoke too much and they spoke too little. As a result, they were disengaged and unavailable to learn the concept or skill I taught. Consequently, they would have poor application of the strategy and poor quality responses to their stop and jot question. At that moment, I knew that I needed to change my instructional strategies.

Following this discovery, I studied the *Connecticut Common Core of Teaching* to assess my current level of performance in *Instruction for Active Learning Indicator 4.3*. I saw that my teaching practices included "...instructional strategies that focus on having students develop skills" and that my "discussions are generally teacher directed and beginning to focus on more open ended questions." I recognized an area for potential growth and set a goal to learn active instructional strategies to encourage meaningful student to student discourse during Reader's Workshop lessons. These strategies, in theory, would then increase student engagement as well as their quality of responses.

To learn these instructional strategies, I began by establishing a book club with several of my colleagues. We all had limited experience with the Reader's Workshop model, and we felt we would greatly benefit from learning together. We began by reading *Growing Readers* by Kathy Collins. This text provided me with information on how to run a Reader's Workshop as well as how important it is for students to participate in "active engagement." This is a time during the mini lesson where students engage in conversations with a partner to "try out a skill", "act as researchers as they watch a demonstration", and "plan out *their+ work *and thinking+ out loud." (Collins, 2004). I learned that student to student discourse is crucial for increasing student engagement and curiosity. It also allows students time to formulate their thinking and practice the concept or skill, which leads to higher quality responses.

As I began to learn more, I knew I wanted an expert opinion on how I could improve my current teaching practices. I scheduled two Reader's Workshop specialists and my mentor to come observe me teach Reader's Workshop. I asked them to take particular note of student engagement, student to student discourse, and the quality of their responses. From these observations and post-observation meetings, I gained insight in how to further increase partner talk through the "turn and talk" strategy. I learned that this strategy allows students to practice the concept I modeled in a safe, engaging conversation with a peer. This properly prepares them to apply the concept to their reading during independent practice.

I knew that it would also be beneficial for me to visit another teacher whose Reader's Workshop had been established and successful for several years. Therefore, the last learning activity I engaged in was observing a third grade teacher during her Reader's Workshop block. This was, by far, the most informative and beneficial learning activity I participated in. I was able to see everything I had been learning put into action. I absorbed many things while observing, but perhaps the most significant piece of knowledge I gained was the importance of high quality, explicit modeling during a ten-minute mini-lesson. This led me to believe that communicating a clear, concise purpose to the mini-lesson was critical.

As this teacher skillfully modeled high level thinking as well as a quality response, students were extremely engaged. They knew their purpose during the mini lesson: that it was their job to be a "detective" and observe how an expert would apply that particular concept or strategy. As a result, when it came time for the students to formulate their own thoughts on the concept and share, they



confidently engaged in thoughtful, insightful conversations that were congruent with the teacher's modeling. With this new information on active engagement and explicit, succinct, high quality modeling, I moved forward to apply the new instructional strategies I had learned to my Reader's Workshop.

At first, I didn't see the substantial results I was expecting. I observed small improvements such as the students being engaged in a conversation for four-six minutes. The amount of time I spent talking hadn't decreased at all, nor had I implemented any modeling. As a result, my students were not actively engaged, and only six students typically raised hands to answer my questions. Similarly, their responses to their stop and jots were still poor quality, including answers such as, "My prediction was Pip was smart." It lacked any indication that the student understood the concept, any specific language from the text, or supporting details. Again, I saw that my students were not learning as much as they could. I knew that to truly increase their engagement, and consequently, their understanding and application of the concepts to their independent practice, I needed to become more succinct with my speaking and increase my level of modeling. I quickly implemented these changes and saw a significant impact on my teaching.

My teaching was first impacted when I decreased the amount of time I spent talking. I focused on my speaking and reduced the time from sixteen-nineteen minutes to eight-eleven minutes. This immediately made me focus my speaking and modeling. To remain focused and limit my speaking, I began to chart my mini lessons out on my easel as I had seen in the other Reader's Workshop classroom. My easel included highlighted vocabulary I wanted my students to learn, as well as bullet points for specific strategy application. For example, in a fluency unit, the lesson objective was how to read with expression based on punctuation marks. On my easel, I had the title "Reading Using Punctuation." Underneath, I had bullets that included, "You change the tone of your voice based on the punctuation mark at the end of the sentence." I also created a table with a column filled with punctuation marks and a corresponding space to write the specific expression to be used. By charting and focusing my speaking, I was able to reduce the amount of time I spent talking.

Secondly, my teaching was impacted when I clearly communicated the role of students during my modeling. This was another instructional strategy I gained from observing the Reader's Workshop classroom. I asked that students "watch and listen to me as I read through this big book. I want you to be listening detectives for when my tone changes and pay attention to what punctuation mark went with it." Before I even began to read, I noticed students were hanging onto each word I said, eyes focused on the book. They were actively engaged and ready to be "detectives." I knew that this was an effective instructional strategy because now my students were available for learning.

The third impact on my teaching was making sure that I always included high quality modeling during my succinct mini lessons. By reducing my amount of time spent talking and having my students actively engaged, I now had an opportunity for my students to absorb the modeling. For example, in this same lesson, I modeled reading with appropriate expression and then thought out loud, "Hmm... I notice there is an exclamation point here. I think I should read this sentence really excited," and I proceeded to do so. After several think alouds about expression and punctuation in my modeled reading, I sensed that my students were ready to apply this concept. Since I had moved so succinctly through my teaching points and my high quality modeling, I had time for students to turn to their partner and discuss which tone of voice I used with each punctuation mark. This was something I never was able to do before!

This was the next impact on my teaching: making sure I have time for students to participate in meaningful student to student discourse. I had seen the positive impact it had in the Reader's Workshop



classroom I observed, and my reading supported this strategy. During this same lesson, I had about seven minutes for students to engage in conversations with each other. I asked students to “turn and talk” about a time my expression changed based on the punctuation mark. I modeled for students how I would respond to this question by saying, “Miss K’s voice was very questioning when she read that sentence that ended with a punctuation mark.” As they eagerly spoke with each other using the response structure I modeled, I implemented another new strategy of circulating and observing the partnerships. This allowed me to listen in to each of their conversations and gauge if they were able to understand and think about this reading skill.

The final impact on my teaching was to include time for students to share their thinking that was formulated during their “turn and talk” time. As conversations wound down from their “turn and talk”, I had students share their thinking. As students shared thoughtful responses that matched my modeling, I saw the value of all of the instructional strategies I learned and implemented.

I began to include these instructional strategies in each Reader’s Workshop lesson I did and, very rapidly, I saw the positive impact on student learning. The first positive impact on student learning was in the level of their engagement. Student engagement and participation in my mini lessons was very low at the beginning of the year. Now, students are highly engaged and curious about the lesson. I believe this impact came from reducing the amount of time I spent talking as well as clearly articulating the students’ job for each mini lesson. Now, they truly take on the task of being a “detective” during my modeling, so that they are prepared to speak to their partner and practice the skill during their turn and talk time. As I ask questions, I find that approximately eighteen students now raise their hands to participate and share their high quality answers.

Another positive impact on student learning is their ability to observe my modeling and apply it to their own thinking during their “turn and talk” time. As students participate in their “turn and talk” time (which currently lasts about five-seven minutes), they are highly engaged and motivated to share high quality, thoughtful, well-developed responses. For example, to conclude a unit on fluency, we had a Reader’s Theater activity. Throughout the unit, students learned what makes a reader fluent. As each group performed their plays, students listened intently for fluency. After the performance, students turned to talk with a partner about that group’s fluency strengths and areas for improvement. As I listened into their conversations, I was impressed with the level of discussion occurring. One partnership engaged in the following conversation: (Student 1): “I think strength was that they paused just the right amount of time with punctuation marks. Something they could work on is adding in more character tone.” (Student 2): “I think so too! I think that they could have used an angrier tone for the troll when he stopped that last billy goat.” I also observed partnerships paying each other compliments that include, “Wow! What great thinking!” As the compliments are exchanged, a sense of pride can be felt within the room. This serves as continued motivation to be engaged in the lesson, make unique discoveries, and share high quality ideas.

The last, and perhaps greatest, impact I saw on my students’ learning is in the quality of their “stop and jot” responses. The “stop and jot” serves as a tool for me to assess how well students are applying the mini lesson concept or skill to their independent practice. After consistently implementing the new instructional strategies, I found that students were truly learning and applying the learning gained during the mini lesson. After using these new instructional strategies for about three weeks, 81% of my students had a score of an eight on their “stop and jot” using the nine-point rubric mentioned earlier. 0% of my students scored below a five. Just a few short weeks beyond this, 86% of my students were scoring a nine. 0% of my students scored below a seven. Their responses became more detailed,



reflected their understanding of the concepts or skills, and included specific details from the text. For example, one “stop and jot” question was, “How did your tone match what was going on in the story?” One student responded, “In the story, the narrator was feeling happy so I used a happy tone. The reason the narrator was happy was because he had just spotted a cute billy goat crossing the bridge in the story. At that moment, this made him feel happy.” Other responses matched this quality and continue to show improvements today.

Having seen such positive impacts on my teaching and my students’ learning, I know that these instructional strategies are effective. I have continued to apply these strategies to Reader’s Workshop and have continued to see positive results. As a result, I have started to include explicit modeling and “turn and talk” time in other subject areas. Already, I have seen results similar to those I found in Reader’s Workshop. There is higher engagement, participation, and higher quality of responses. For example, during the closure of a math lesson, I asked students, “Why do you think it is important for you to know so many addition strategies?” At first, only four hands were raised to answer. I quickly modeled my thinking for students and then asked students to “turn and talk” about this. After the “turn and talk,” I asked the question again. This time, sixteen hands were raised and thoughtful responses were shared.

To continue to grow and improve my instructional strategies, I will be continuing my current book club. We have plans to start a new book, *Conferring with Readers*, when we are finished with our current book. I am also planning to continue to be observed by the Reader’s Workshop specialists as well as observe teachers running their own Reader’s Workshops. Their advice and modeling, in conjunction with continued dialogue with colleagues regarding Reader’s Workshop, will help me improve my own instructional practices.