Sample Reflection Paper for Module Two 9/17/10
Module Two: Planning for Active Learning
Sample One – Grade 9, English Language Arts

Your Reflection Paper should include the following components:

- the Initial Summary and Professional Growth Goal that you created at the beginning of the module (these will be automatically transferred to your reflection paper);
- a description of your professional growth activities and what you learned from them;
- a description of how you applied your new learning as you planned for upcoming instruction, supported by specific examples from your Journal;
- an analysis of how your practice has changed and the anticipated impact on student learning/performance comparing your practice described in the Initial Summary to your outcomes; and
- a plan for extending the professional growth experience by building on your current practices related to the chosen Indicator or by making a connection to one other CCT Performance Profile Indicator within the Domain.

**Goal:**
I will learn three ways to differentiate instruction and apply that knowledge to plan a series of lessons for the upcoming To Kill a Mockingbird unit. As a result of using differentiated strategies, students will improve their reading comprehension skills. (Indicator 1)

**Initial Summary:**
I currently have been directing my instruction to the whole class. I don’t consider the individual students and their own specific learning needs. Although I had given students an Interest Inventory and a Learning Styles Assessment in the beginning of the year, I have not used that information to design my lessons. I do not consistently use my knowledge of students to plan instruction. I rarely design lessons that include differentiated activities that not only help my low achieving students to be more successful, but also challenge my higher achieving students. 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.

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.

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 think of my students first. I would need to consider their individual strengths and weaknesses, before I start planning. Most importantly, I would need 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. The way I’ve planned so far was only using the curriculum but now I see that I need to combine the needs of my students with the expectations of the curriculum. If I do that, it will then be easier to anticipate road blocks or challenges, something that I have not done before I started this module. My lesson plans should be the road map that will lead all my students to successfully meet the expectations of the curriculum.

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). Since I knew what many of my students’ learning styles and interests were from the Learning Style Survey and an Interest Inventory they completed 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 meet my students’ individual 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 strategies/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 To Kill a Mockingbird 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.

As I previously mentioned, an important new learning for me was that when you plan you have to think of your students first, therefore, 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 planned to also differentiate activities and products for the different learners. Groups one and two 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 three included the four students who scored barely proficient and one student who scored slightly higher, but still needed added support. Groups four and five 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 the vocabulary might be by having students associate the new words with the themes related to the novel. This would also align with what the literacy coach had said about having students actively engage with the words.

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. It was not difficult to see that many of the words were going to be very challenging for students in groups one and two, but I wasn’t sure if all of the students in groups three, four and five needed the same instruction for the vocabulary. I planned to use a word/idea free association activity as a pre-assessment to determine the students’ needs. 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 use the data from the pre-assessment to modify the plan. I needed to be proactive and use the data!

I remembered a workshop I had attended while doing my student teaching, it was about using vocabulary to build background knowledge. The workshop was based on Marzano’s book Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement. The reading consultant had a copy of the book. This was taking me to something I had not thought about when doing the Professional Growth Action Plan but my mentor said that it was worth exploring. This book gave me a way to combine building background knowledge with vocabulary instruction. My thought process kept going to my new learning: think of your students first and anticipate challenges. If I want my students to understand the themes in the book they need to have a sense of the time in which the novel took place and how were the relationships between black and white, rich and poor people in the South. I found many online resources that had photographs of those times. I was so excited, I could front load the vocabulary with all the photographs while I was building their background for depth of understanding. This slide show will benefit both visual and auditory learners and will bring technology to the English classroom. All students
will be able to connect To Kill a Mockingbird with that time period of our history.

Once students develop a context for the time and period, I plan to administer the vocabulary pre-assessment. 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 planned to further differentiate for vocabulary, by having students use the vocabulary words in context with sentences from the text. They will 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 rest of the class will start reading the first chapter of the book and complete an activity called “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 and discuss how the quote relates to justice or prejudice. 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. They can support their answers using the words from the vocabulary. Additionally, they will be asked to predict what the novel will be about.

Next I will focus on understanding and interpretation of the text. Since some of the students 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 one and two will probably need assistance with completing their reading of chapter one I will plan to 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.
In my third lesson I plan to focus on character development by taking a close look at the character of Boo Radley who was introduced in Chapter one. Since one of my overarching goals is to analyze how characters change, it is important for the students to examine the nature of human beings. Are we essentially good or essentially evil? To help students understand this character, I will differentiate the process and products for the groups. Groups one and two 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 see connections to other indicators of the CCT Profile. I have been proactive in planning differentiated instruction for students who do not respond to primary instruction (Indicator 4) and can with regard to developing and organizing relevant units build on student information (Indicator 2) and design instruction at an appropriate level of challenge, differentiated to meet the varied needs of all learners (Indicator 1). 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. I want to move beyond grouping by ability and think more about establishing flexible groups that will meet my students’ needs and also ensure that students have opportunities to work with peers of both similar and dissimilar abilities and
achievements, interests and learning profiles. I also want to be sure to plan activities that not only meet learners’ needs but also challenge them and give them more responsibility for their own learning. Additionally, I want to study further how I can differentiate by content as well as process and products. I look forward to continuing the level of conversation that I have recently had with my mentor and other colleagues, as I continue to explore how I can differentiate instruction to help improve all of my students’ learning. I look forward to continuing the level of conversation that I have recently had with my mentor and other colleagues, as I continue to explore how I can continue improving my planning to help improve all of my students’ achievement.