

## Module 2-Planning

**CCT Performance Profile Indicator #2:** Developing and organizing coherent and relevant units, lessons, and learning tasks that build on students' prior knowledge, skills, and interests and engage students in the work of the discipline.

**Professional Growth Goal:** I will learn how to plan literacy tasks so that my students are actively engaged. As a result, my students will participate in meaningful activities that will allow them to think critically and engage in meaningful discourse across content areas.

**Initial Summary:** Right now my planning for literacy tasks has come as a mix of our Mondo reading resource that we use in our district, as well as other literacy activities utilized by my grade level partners. Tasks include focus on phonics, listening, handwriting, fluency, revising, reading comprehension, and responding in writing about reading. While these tasks are helpful for students to practice skills we have learned in reading and writing, I feel that some of them do not keep my students actively engaged or thinking critically about the reading strategies/writing strategies they have learned. I notice that some students are not talking about their reading and have difficulty staying on task, especially when completing more open ended tasks. During this module I would like to fine tune my reading tasks and approach to instruction to help my students take an active and engaging role in their learning.

In reviewing my current practice within the classroom I noticed that my students' have had difficulty having meaningful conversations (engaging in back and forth discourse) in reading, writing, and math. I have struggled to provide my students with opportunities to elaborate on their thinking. I give them opportunities to talk but they don't elaborate or ask questions. My students will talk but often do not listen to their partner and need reminders to elaborate and say more when discussing a given topic or question. Usually I see my students not actively listening to their partner and even see them looking at other things around the classroom instead of the person who is talking. During reading, in particular, students are quick to say what they think, but do not frequently listen to or elaborate on what another peer has to say.

After looking at the CCT for module 2, I felt that an area where I needed the most growth was indicator 2, developing and organizing coherent and relevant units, lessons and learning tasks that build on students' prior knowledge, skills and interests and engage students in the work of the discipline. After reflecting on my in class observations, I decided to focus on creating ways to actively engage my students in meaningful discourse. I chose to focus in on reading centers because I noticed students having difficulty independently talking about their reading and staying engaged with the task at hand. Discourse is an important way for students to share their thinking but can also help shape their thinking through the exchange of ideas and thoughts.

Before I could expect students to independently engage in meaningful discourse, I knew I needed to investigate the meaning of discourse, look at the research around classroom discourse, begin to build a plan to promote it, and model what an active conversation looks like. I started by consulting a

## Module 2-Planning

book called Learning by Doing by Richard DuFour (2006). I focused on one chapter in particular entitled “Creating a Focus for Learning”. On page 62, DuFour speaks of the importance of focusing on two very critical questions when planning any kind of lesson or unit:

1. What is it we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?

To answer these two questions, DuFour suggests that teachers consider state standards and district curriculum, assessments that provide up to date information about students, and proficiency on state standardized testing when planning. I knew that these two questions and considering state standards and assessments would be very important for me to keep in mind as I began to plan for discourse in my classroom. DuFour also suggests three other questions to consider as teachers assess the significance of a certain standard or goal:

1. Does it have endurance?
2. Does it have leverage?
3. Does it develop student readiness for the next level of learning?

After reflecting on all of these questions, I used them to focus my planning by thinking about skills and lessons would help my students’ discourse improve in all areas of academic learning. By planning in this way, I wanted to ensure that the skills I was teaching to my students would be beneficial to them, not just in reading, but as they talked about math, writing, social studies, and science as well. Out of these three questions, endurance stuck out to me as the most important. I learned that I need to make sure that the skills I am teaching to my students will be useful to them, not just in first grade but in the grades to follow.

Before I could begin to plan for a reading center focusing on active discourse, I knew that I needed to define discourse and know what it would look like for my first grade students. I started by looking at definitions of discourse. I consulted my mentor (our literacy coach) who introduced me to the text Academically Productive Classroom Discourse by Dr. David Cormier (2014). Dr. Cormier references the definition of discourse, as provided by Spiegel, Zwiers and Crawford, and de Garcia, as “a purposeful interchange of ideas through which meaning can be developed, strengthened, revised, and extended. It is the way ideas are exchanged between people who are trying to learn from one another and build meaning they did not have before (Spiegel, D.L., (2005); Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011); and de Garcia (Math Solutions)).” This is what I want my students to do each day, not just in reading but in all areas of the curriculum. Next I decided what meaningful discourse in my classroom would look like. To me, discourse is students who are looking at their partner, actively listening, and then responding to what their partner has said. Just as Dr. Cormier et al. suggested, discourse is more than talking, it is listening to a different perspective and then possibly changing the way a child thinks about or solves something.

From Dr. Cormier, I learned that the most common discourse patterns in classrooms today are teacher-student conversations, which involve a teacher questioning, a student response, and a teacher statement (p.4). A video of a speech by Lucy West, shared by the Superintendent of Manchester Public Schools, also informed my thinking about this “culture of public discourse”. Ms. West states that when

## Module 2-Planning

the teacher and student are engaging, the rest of the class is often disengaged (Student Achievement Division, 2013). She suggests that students not only need to talk to each other, they also need to learn to listen. As I have tried to include more opportunities to talk in my classroom this year, I have found that my students have difficulty not just engaging in meaningful conversation, they also have trouble listening. Before I could plan to see my students' discussions during reading centers change, I realized that I needed to plan introductory lessons to model and teach them how to talk to each other. In Ms. West's words I needed to, "SLOW DOWN," and really give my students a chance to talk and listen.

I considered DuFour's second question, how will I know when my students have learned to engage in meaningful discourse? What will it look like? I thought back to my definition of discourse, which included students talking, looking at their partner, listening, and responding to what their partner has said. Using these characteristics of active discourse, I created lessons to teach and model each part of a meaningful conversation for my students. I decided to introduce lessons sequentially over the course of a week to give students time to understand and learn discourse skills as well as practice talking and listening to each other. I plan to use my shared reading time block to focus on building in discourse, not only because I want to utilize it for reading centers but also because the Speaking and Listening Common Core State Standards (CCSS.SL.1.1) expect that first grade students participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults (CCSS, 2014). Not only are students expected to participate in collaborative conversations, they are also expected to follow agreed upon rules for discussions (CCSS.SL.1.1a), respond to other students' comments (CCSS.SL.1.1b), and ask questions to clear up any confusion about a topic (CCSS.SL.1.1c).

As I planned for introducing discourse, I reflected on the communication skills my students already are successful at. Every morning, students greet one another using a set of rules that we learned and practiced since the beginning of the school year. During morning meeting students know how to respectfully greet each other: face each other, look at the other person, and use a positive tone of voice when greeting. As I introduce discourse to my students, I will make the connection between the rules we use to greet each other and rules that we use in conversations.

To introduce discourse I wanted to find a model of a good meaningful conversation. My students love Mo Willem's books about Elephant and Piggie. These books are wonderful examples of everyday conversations between friends. I found an excellent mentor text entitled I Love My New Toy! to use when introducing what a conversation looks like. I also plan to introduce the parts of a discussion in the order in which they occur naturally. The first lesson will include talking about what a conversation is and what it looks and sounds like. In the second lesson, I will introduce the importance of staying on topic. Following this lesson, students would then learn about taking turns and listening. Finally, in the fourth lesson, students will practice asking questions and responding to what their partner has said about a given topic. Following the introduction of the parts of a conversation, I plan to introduce talk cards that my students can refer to when they are engaging in discourse and get stuck. These talk cards will be a cue to help them either begin a conversation or dive deeper into a topic. I plan to have these cards available during both whole group lessons as well as at my literacy and math centers so that students can use them individually or when prompted to do so.

## Module 2-Planning

As I teach my students the components of meaningful discourse, I recognize that there are parts they may struggle with and be successful at. When I see students struggle with a concept, I will rely on more modeling for students and referring back to the talk cards I will be providing as a resource for them. Introducing the skills may take more than four days of practice. Before asking them to independently have these conversations, I know that they will need ample opportunities to practice before it becomes a center and a routine. I will also make sure to point out examples of authentic discourse as it occurs throughout our school day.

While planning for this module, I realized that my goal of planning for engaging discourse during my reading centers did change slightly. As I started planning, I realized that before I could expect my students to participate in independent meaningful discourse, they needed to have a foundation of what a conversation is and what they would be expected to do. As a result, my planning began with what my students needed to know before I could expect them to do it independently. I know that first graders need many opportunities for practice and modeling in order to be successfully independent with a skill. Taking the time to break down discourse into expected behaviors and provide opportunities for practice will help my students to be more successful with meaningful conversations in small group or in whole group settings. I learned planning must include thought about what you want students to learn and what skills or prior knowledge they must have in order to master a new skill or goal. After giving students ample time to practice active discourse, I plan to introduce talk cards to my students to use as a resource when talking with their partner during reading centers. I plan to introduce an oral language center into my reading block. This center will include a picture for students to look at and talk about. The talk cards will help to stem conversations with prompts of simple idea sharing like, "I think" or "I agree/disagree". As my students become more proficient with discourse, I will introduce cards that support elaboration of ideas and details for example, "I agree with \_\_\_\_ because..." or "That reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_" and expressing opinions, "I wonder why/if \_\_\_\_\_" or "This makes me think \_\_\_\_\_." I recognize that while I will give students time to practice these skills as a whole group before asking them to independently engage in discourse, that 20 minutes (the length of a reading center) is a long time to expect six year olds to engage in meaningful conversation. If students are struggling to spend the whole amount of time talking about the picture provided I plan to have other pictures available for them to look at and talk about. Another option that I could utilize is having students write about their conversation. Partner planning is a strategy we have learned to use before writing.

Though this module, I have learned to really think about the endurance and leverage of the skills and concepts I am teaching to my students. Taking the time to thoughtfully plan and build the foundation for discourse will help my students in all areas of their academic learning. I will be giving my students the power to drive their understanding of the concepts we are learning throughout the day by teaching them to listen, think, respond, and share. I know that this will be challenging for both myself, (letting my students take the lead) as well as for my students (building the confidence to really challenge their brains) however it is a very valuable skill that will, hopefully, help them to become more independent thinkers in the years to come. I'd like to conclude with a few of the benefits of discourse, as identified by Silver, Dewing, and Perini: "Research shows that students in discussion-rich classrooms

## **Module 2-Planning**

experience real academic and social benefits; deeper comprehension, greater empathy and respect for their peers, and an increased ability to handle rigorous content (2012).