

## Module 1

**CCT Performance Indicator #2** – Promoting engagement in and shared responsibility for the learning process including encouraging opportunities for students to initiate their own questions and inquiry.

**Professional Growth Goal** - My professional growth goal that I have decided on is, that I will research and implement strategies and activities that foster student inquiry. As a result, I am hoping that my students will ask and respond to more higher order thinking questions.

**Initial Summary** - I think that promoting inquiry in my classroom is something that would help me become a better teacher and help my students to become better learners. I am tired of the low level of thinking in my classroom. More often than not, I present a question to my students and I receive an answer of either, yes, no, a number or "I don't know". I very rarely get any answers or questions that shows that my students are thinking and creating their own ideas on what we are doing. After an initial observation by my mentor, she realized that maybe one child asked a question during my lesson. Kids tend to sit back, take notes and do the work, even if they do not understand what's going on. I want to engage my students in a way that they can ask questions and think freely about what is going on. I think this is partially my fault, as a new teacher I do not think I am extremely challenging on my students. I think sometimes I am just happy to get a yes or no answer because it shows participation. I need to strive for better of myself. I need to ask more thought provoking questions so that I can help stimulate my student's minds.

As a brand new teacher I could have written this paper on all the given topics, but being that I had to choose, I choose the topic that I believed was most significant to my classes. For this module I have chosen to write about promoting inquiry within my classes. In education, Inquiry has to do with the ability of a student to seek, think and question in a way to gain some information or knowledge. As I quickly realized, my students did not seek, think or question to find out any information. I knew as a teacher I had to make a change so I took this TEAM opportunity to really focus in and make the changes needed.

As I began the process, I took a look over the CCT Performance Profile. After reading through the Continuum of Effective Teaching, I realized that at my current state I did not give the students much responsibility for non-instructional tasks. I also realized how I gave them even less responsibilities during instructional time. This needed to change for my students and I to become a more effective and efficient class. I needed to raise their levels of responsibility and have them take ownership of their own learning during both instructional and non-instructional learning times.

To start my module, my advisor and I decided that she would monitor a class to record engagement, responses and inquiry levels. We choose my third period class that consisted of twenty-two students. I taught the lesson just like I had been doing since the beginning of the year. My lessons usually consist of a "Do Now", which is followed by a short topic

discussion, modeling, guided practice and then individual/group practice. I knew that this method of teaching was not going to continuously cause great success out of my students, but I never realized how bad things actually were until I looked over my advisors notes. Out of the twenty-two students, fourteen were engaged in the lesson. The other students were drawing pictures, playing with their phones or talking to other students. When it came to responses, like usual we had mostly, yes, no, a number or "I don't know". Lastly, out of the twenty-two students one student asked a question that showed actual thought during the lesson.

I was not completely surprised by all the information we got from observing my students. I think a lot of the blame for this needs to go onto me. As a new teacher I think sometimes I would just accept what was going on because I just wanted to get through my lesson. As a new teacher sometimes I'd get nervous and take the first answer I would receive. It did not matter how elaborate or thought provoking these answers were, I was just happy somebody was listening and cared enough to answer. Another thing I noticed I would do was, I'd let the same three students answer all the questions while the rest of the class just listened. This was another problem caused by me, again I was just happy the lesson was moving forward and we were getting through the work we needed to get through. Throughout the eight-week module, I made sure to fix these new teaching practices that I had developed. I strived to be more confident and not accept weak answers.

To begin my work on this module, I decided to observe the questioning strategies of a seventh and eight-grade language arts teacher. I decided to observe her while she was going over one of the books that her class was reading. During the lesson she would bring up questions about the sections that the students had just recently read. Most of the kids were engaged in the book and most kids would participate in the discussions. One thing I noticed during the class was that she made sure to ask all of the students a question. No student was given the chance to sit back and be unengaged. The kids were all on point because they were scared of being asked a question. This was interesting for me to observe, some of the students in her class had been doing the bare minimum in my class. In her class they were engaged answering and asking questions. Another thing I observed was that if a student asked a question she would answer it back with another question. This would go on and on until the child could answer their own question. This was great for the kids that were paying attention and understood the book. Instead of just giving an answer she really promoted inquiry within the students. I also noticed how she would keep rewording the question in an attempt to make it more familiar for the student.

From my language arts observations I made some new changes to my lessons in an attempt to increase the inquiry and engagement. First off, I instituted a new classroom rule. I explained that if you are confused or unsure of something we are doing you must raise your hand and ask a question. From this, I quickly realized that kids think the term "I don't know" is not only an acceptable response but that it is also a question. So from this we made another rule that the term "I don't know" is not allowed as a response in class. This worked out well for the class. In one particular occasion with a student, she took questioning to the extreme. One day during a lesson on solving two-step equations,

A girl was unsure of something that was going on. She raised her hand and informed me that she was confused, so with the new rules I asked her to ask a questions about something we were doing, she gave the banned response of “I don’t know.” From this we discussed how we could ask questions to get a better understanding of what was going on. So the girl proceeded to ask about ten questions about the last problem. It was amazing, she really cared to understand what was going on and made the effort to think about the problem. After all was said and done, I had answered all of her questions and made the lesson very clear to her. The questioning worked extremely well for the girl, during individual practice the girl actually took a group of students aside and taught them how to do the work. This was amazing for me to see. She had really grasped the concept and taken it to another level in that she could teach it. While she was asking questions, the students that were paying attention also got better understandings of what was going on, but I still missed out on the kids that were unengaged.

The next step in my module was to get more students engaged in the lesson. The way to begin to increase engagement was to make math more realistic. I saw in the language arts class that kids were engaged in a book that had to do with children their own age. I think that being able to make a connection to the material makes it more interesting and life like. Sometimes in math things may seem boring if you can’t make a connection. From this point on I decided to make every math lesson have some connection to real life. I came in the next day with the new lesson topic called “How much is my xbox?” rather than “Solving two step equations.” Just looking at the two titles makes the one with the xbox in it stand out to a student. The lesson began with showing students a problem about how I couldn’t afford the xbox I wanted. I told the students that the xbox costs \$300, I couldn’t afford the \$300 price but with a payment plan I could put down \$150 and pay off the rest in three monthly payments of some equal amount. The kids answered this with ease. They knew right away that I would pay \$50 per month. After that, I showed the students the mathematical problem that they just solved  $3x + 150 = 300$ . It was great to see the kids explain from there own knowledge how to solve the mathematical problem. Since that day I have always made a realistic hook to my lessons. As times goes on I’m definitely going to keep giving the students this kind of realistic cue because the connection helps to get the kids interested and engaged.

So now that I had begun to have my students thinking, questioning and being more engaged in the class, I needed to step up my teaching ability. For the next step in my inquiry-increasing plan, I was to add in higher level thinking questions by using Blooms Taxonomy. Bloom’s Taxonomy gives educators different kinds of question initiators. As you got up in Bloom’s Taxonomy, the questions reflect a higher level of thinking for students. I noticed that in most of my work I had kept things basic with the students only being asked questions from the knowledge section of the taxonomy. I needed to bring up my questioning level so that my students could be challenged. At first, when I implemented the taxonomy I made sure that every lesson had at least one higher thinking question. I knew that since these students had never really been challenged, that these questions would be a work in progress. Some types of questions I added into my lessons were, that I would put up two problems done different ways and ask the students to compare the methods used to solve them. Compare falls in the understanding level of the

taxonomy and gives students the chance to show their knowledge of the subject. This was the start of moving past knowledge questions. As time went on the questions began to move up the taxonomy. One question I asked was to examine the problem on the board and explain where the student went wrong. For these questions I would put up a problem on a quiz that a student had done wrong, the kids would then use their own quiz answers to help answer the given problem. These types of questions were combinations of more than one higher level of thinking. As time went on my students began to improve at these kinds of questions. Towards the end of the module, I began to give students higher order questions for homework. Based on how well the kids were doing with the in class questions, I would differentiate and give different kids different levels of higher order questions. This has been going great as kids are continuously moving out of the basic knowledge questions and into the higher levels.

While all of this was going on, my mentor suggested that I make an attempt to rearrange the room in a way that would help promote inquiry and engagement. When the module began my students sat in rows. They were all separated from each other in an attempt for me to gain a strong control over the class. Once I had a grasp on the class it was time to change things up. My advisor gave me the book “The First Day of School” by Harry Wong in an attempt to give me some fresh ideas. The first thing I realized was that I needed to arrange the room in a way that I could get from point A to point B as easily as possible. I wanted to implement walkways so I could easily get to every kid in the class. I needed to do this to help enhance my presence within the classroom and increase the engagement. With the rows it became too congested in the class. I wasn’t able to get to all the kids during a lesson. Students knew they were safe from me coming to them and had the chance to sit back and relax. The other most important thing was that I wanted to create cooperative learning groups that would help promote inquiry. I wanted to group kids in a way that every group had students of mixed ability. So when all was said and done I came up with a design that gave me a “U” shaped walk way. This walk way made it easy for me to get to every student. The kids would sit in groups of three with some groups in blocks and some in “L” shapes so that every student could be looking at the board and so that I should never have a student’s back to me. Lastly, I split up the kids in a way that each group has a heterogeneous mix of learners. I liked this arrangement because I believe that each kid would benefit from the mixed pairings. Students would learn from each other and also get the chance to help each other. The mix also helped for group work. Students that understood the topic better were able to help a confused student. Being able to help and teach shows great understanding and leads to a high level of thinking. Overall, the new seating arrangement has increased the level of thinking and effort in the classroom. I think in the upcoming weeks I will shake things up and mix the groups up in an attempt to see if I can make better learning groups.

The last thing I did to help me with this module was to study some of the works of Robert Marzano. I was reading the book “Classroom Instruction That Works,” and came across the section “reinforcing effort and providing recognition”. After reading the section I made the connection to how I could reward effort and provide recognition for different class behaviors. I thought that this would be a great way to increase the engagement and levels of work in my class. I came up with some immediate and long-term rewards.

Immediately I created tickets that gave points on a quiz or test. As class goes on I walk around and hand tickets out to the students that are doing the right things. If they answer a question well, are doing the work they are supposed to and are behaving, then they can earn one of these tickets. On a bigger scale I came up with the idea of "Fun Lunch." Everyday I give the kids checks based on how well they worked and behaved in class. The "Fun Lunch" boards are up for four weeks and a student has to earn fifteen out of the twenty checks to earn the lunch. Usually the lunch consists of a movie, cookies, soda, chips and candy. Kids seem to really get excited for these rewards. By giving out these rewards, I think it has helped to make the non-engaged students jealous and more inclined to participate at a higher level than usual. Lastly, I think that just by giving students encouragement in class helps to increase inquiry and engagement. By telling the under achiever he's doing great and your proud of him can really go a long way. As time has gone on I have given out more tickets and more students have attended fun lunch due to improvements in class.

As I wrap up module one, I think that I have made great strides since my first day as a teacher. As I look over some New Haven district exam data I see the improvements in my classes. One class scored 77% on the open-ended question compared to the district, which scored 55%. My classes are making great strides right now, but this will be an on going process of making changes and improvements to my teaching styles. Eight weeks is a short time period for this project but I think I have shown the high level of effort to really make and improve to my students overall level of learning.