

## Reflection Paper

**Subject:** English, Interdisciplinary Block

**Grade:** 10

**Module 2: Planning for Active Learning :** Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

**Selected Indicator:** 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.

### Goal:

I will learn to incorporate a variety of methods to develop a series of lessons that actively engage students to think critically and solve problems by using strategic questions for inquiry-based learning and making connections across disciplines. As a result, I anticipate student achievement and motivation will increase (Indicator 2).

### Initial Summary:

My classes are comprised of students who have difficulty seeing how their core classes fit together in the greater puzzle of learning. They often rely on the teacher to make interdisciplinary connections and to feed and facilitate discussion. They seem to believe that Math is only used in Math, Biology in Biology, etc. As a result, they do not see how many subjects attack problems with a similar process of thinking, and that what is learned in Math can also apply to English, Biology to Social Studies, etc. When I consider how I run my classes, I realize I have not spent enough time using common language and strategies that are used across disciplines. I am currently on a team for 10th graders that has an interdisciplinary block, which is supposed to highlight ways in which the core curriculum overlaps, especially when it comes to problem-solving and public discourse. This block is partially an attempt to engage students in inquiry-based learning by exploring interdisciplinary connections. However, background knowledge differs immensely from student to student, so it is a challenge to develop discourse among their peers, even to discuss "hot topics" believed to hold a high level of interest and relevance. We hope that by including this block, student achievement and motivation will increase by giving students the opportunity to explore cross-discipline connections organically and develop skills related to holding conversations and solving problems collaboratively.

### Reflection:

I began this module considering the shift in my school to Performance Tasks based on Common Core skills and my current practices for assessing student work. It became clear that although I was assessing the skills I was teaching, I was not providing very many opportunities for students to

engage in inquiry-based learning and make connections across disciplines. Many of the connections I was making were inconsequential and unintentional. My mentor and I decided that I should join the group that writes curriculum for the department to gain perspective on how to make assessments that intentionally engage students in critical thinking and making cross-discipline connections, since I would be joining a pilot Interdisciplinary Team this school year. Since I couldn't give very many examples of cross-discipline connections to my mentor, we decided that gaining a better understanding of the English curriculum before attempting to make assessments would aid in creating cross-disciplinary opportunities. We wanted to create tasks that engage students in critical thinking skills by using strategic questions for inquiry-based learning and have students connect the skills they are developing in English to what they are learning in other subject areas, something I was not doing intentionally in the classroom.

In addition to attempting to make assessments more meaningful through the engagement of inquiry-based learning and interdisciplinary connections, we also wanted to be sure that the lessons leading up to these assessments were meaningful in the same way, focusing on the same ideas. We reviewed student performance on the past year's Common Assessments. These results revealed that there was a great disparity in performance between different levels of classes. Most honors students didn't score below a B. Most college prep students scored a C or D, and most post-secondary prep students either scraped by or didn't pass the assessments at all without a curve. In analyzing patterns among specific questions, we wondered if approaching the same types of skills in a different form would be more effective and engaging students in preparation for the assessment. Set up as it was, students answered questions asking them to demonstrate knowledge on literary analysis, context vocabulary, and similarly based language arts skills.

With that, we set to create more meaningful assessments of student skills, connecting those skills across disciplines on the Interdisciplinary Teams as a pilot of the new assessments. After discussing possible common skills among the core classes, we decided to focus our attention on supporting ideas with information that is accurate, specific, and giving credit to author's by citing their sources. Since many of the English Assessments are writing-based, it seemed like a necessary place to start. However, we knew that just citing the information wasn't enough to develop the skill, but that students also needed to be able to tell the difference between what would be a meaningful source and what might be fabricated information. I reached out to a few different teachers in the English and History departments about Source Reliability and how to approach effective researching skills with my students and was able to gather some useful materials to create meaningful lessons both for my English classes and the Interdisciplinary Block class.

With the move to Common Core, there has also been an intentional move to the "Understanding by Design" model of planning, so once we figured out the goals (what we wanted students to learn), we set out to design meaningful ways of assessing that learning. In English, students would be required to write a literary analysis paper exploring an interesting aspect of the novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. In Interdisciplinary, they would apply those same skills in a Public Service Announcement Project. For both assignments, students would be required to not only find outside sources of information, but to also assess that information for accuracy and reliability before integrating it with their own ideas, which would be the result in

their final product.

Once I developed the final product assignment, I began researching lesson ideas to focus on the skills they would need to develop before producing their final product. I didn't want there to be a ton of overlap between classes, so two lessons were reserved for Interdisciplinary, which all students on the team take, and lessons on analyzing what they read and integrating that information with their own ideas would take place in their English classes. This way, four lessons would be intentionally preparing them for what they would be assessed on, and in between lessons, students would practice applying those skills on smaller levels, being sure to incorporate opportunities for students to assess their own progress, based on Marzano's Classroom Assessment & Grading That Work.

In producing these lessons, I know I will have to address four major learning goals. 1) Students will independently research a topic, 2) students will understand what makes a source reliable, accurate, and relevant, 3) students will apply their knowledge of reliable, accurate, and relevant sources to evaluate their own research, and 4) students will integrate their research with their own ideas and produce a final analytical paper (for English). In order to achieve these goals, I plan to use a variety of nonfiction articles with a range of reliability, accuracy, and relevance to what students are going to integrate into their paper. Prior to examining these articles, I plan to have students brainstorm and discuss what makes information reliable, asking the questions, "To what extent should you blindly accept what you read, see, or hear?" and "What makes information reliable?" Then, they will compare those ideas to a Source Evaluation Checklist, which will be compiled based on resources I received from peers and in my own research. This "checklist" will provide a baseline for the research they will need to do for their paper. While they will only need to find one source outside of the novel for this paper, they will need to find one that meets the minimum requirements of the checklist. In order to set them up for success in finding good resources, I will also need to include a mini-lesson on how to use "advanced search" features on search engines, as well as how to access and effectively utilize databases with help from the library media specialists at the school, who already have materials for these types of lessons.

The crucial lesson in this unit will be integrating what has been established as reliable and specific resources with their own ideas. While it is important to know how to find reliable resources and be able to evaluate their relevance and effectiveness on a topic, I know students might struggle with how to incorporate those ideas with their own to create a balance in their writing. As this would be the first major writing assignment of the year, I'm not sure how much experience my students have doing this with their writing. It is highly possible that students will differ in preparedness on the subject. So, when I create a lesson regarding integrating sources into writing, I want to make it engaging and meaningful to what they will be responsible for producing. Students will already be participating in Inquiry-based learning because they will be tracking aspects of the novel (characters, conflicts, symbols, and themes) that they will be choosing. In order to see how to effectively integrate sources, I will create a "fake" paper that uses no sources and provide students with an overview and excerpt of a possible resource. For students who have already shown they have good instincts when it comes to integrating ideas, I will simply give them the fake paper and article and have them improve the paper by integrating ideas from the article. For students who might struggle with so little direction, I will give them a semi-structured organizer that asks

them to take relevant ideas from the article and explain how they relate to the author's ideas in the fake paper before revising it as a bridging step. Then, for students who need additional scaffolding, I will further structure the assignment by giving them a more focused purpose for reading the article and a more structured organizer for both understanding how the ideas relate and how to integrate a balance of ideas in their writing. Depending on the dynamic of the class, this might be done in pairs or groups so that at the end of the lesson, students can compare their new versions and evaluate their effectiveness.

I will also need to incorporate a mini-lesson on citing sources. Students usually know how to do in-text citations from their experience in 9th grade, but have limited experience with creating works cited pages in MLA Format. This lesson does not have to be too extensive, due to numerous resources out there to guide them in citing sources correctly, but most likely a lesson on which tools are most useful and how to use them effectively, as well as a brainstorm and/or discussion on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism.

Throughout this unit, students will be learning about revolutions in their Social Studies classes, which ties nicely into the themes we are exploring in English. Students will be able to use ideas and resources from their social studies class in order to better support their papers as additional resources. Also, students will be demonstrating their mastery of the cross-disciplinary skill of supporting their ideas with evidence, which all of their core class teachers will emphasize as well. They will be making intentional connections with what they will be learning in their Social Studies class in order to begin to see how the puzzle pieces of the world fit together, as well as make their education of both subjects more meaningful. Other resources that could be helpful in this unit are an NPR audio presentation about Wikipedia as a source, video resources on rebellion and revolution, as well as close readings of the text in order to better engage students in exploring their chosen aspects of the text, evaluating outside resources, and integrating outside information.