

## Module 2 – Planning

**Indicator 1:** Determining students' prior knowledge to ensure that content instruction is at an appropriate level of challenge and differentiated to meet their learning needs.

### Reflection Paper:

Planning is a step in the teaching process that is incredibly important, but often overlooked by many teachers. There are many strategies, preparations, and ideas that need to be created, discovered, and molded by a teacher before being presented to students in a lesson. The planning process requires time, effort, and attention that not all educators value as essential. In my pursuit of becoming an excellent teacher, I find planning to be essential to the process of teaching. It can affect the classroom environment, including student behavior, ease of lesson presentation, and effectiveness. As I collected data throughout Module two, I became even more aware of how important planning was for student achievement.

The first step in the process of bettering myself as a teacher coincided with my formal observation by my school principal. Even though the observation is a mandatory part of every teacher's official evaluation that goes into a permanent file, I wanted to take the opportunity to use it as a primary resource. I knew the feedback from a principal would be an irreplaceable resource. As a first year teacher, I was anxious about the observation and evaluation write-up, but also wanted helpful and informative feedback. In my own preparation for my observation I made sure my lesson plans were clear, resources and items prepared for the lesson, and my best effort put forth with patience and firmness. On the day of the observation, my students arrived and were on their best behavior. As I taught, I knew things were going as well as they possibly could until one student started to talk about guns during a independent writing activity. Another student was very alarmed and started yelling to me that student one was talking about inappropriate things. I tried to remain as calm as possible, handle the situation, and keep students on task in a timely manner. Both students did not escalate in behavior or concerns and got back to work fairly quickly. As soon as the lesson was over, I was fully prepared to hear feedback on that particular part of the lesson. When I did meet with my principal to discuss the lesson she barely brought the episode up. I thought she would have a wealth of commentary and advice in how to handle somewhat alarming situations that can arise suddenly. Instead, she focused on the evaluation of my lesson plan.

As a special education teacher, I create a chart of all my individual students and small groups I see throughout the week with blocked times where I then write in the activities and plans I have in place for them. At the start of the school year, my principal told teachers she didn't mind the format in which we write our lesson plans so I chose one that was convenient and easy to read quickly. The format did not allow much room for commentary, notes, and details, but outlined what I was doing with my students. I knew their goals and objectives from their Individualized Education Plans and the lesson objectives. During the review of my lesson with my principal she made it clear she wanted more in my lesson plans. She wanted the goal of the lessons documented in my lesson plans. She discussed how so much of the education changes and reforms currently taking place in the state and the country are concerned with focused and well-planned lessons. As a teacher, especially a special education teacher, she wanted to make sure I was focused on the lesson objective when making my lesson plans. She also discussed the importance of making students aware of the lesson objective; even allowing the students to guess what we were doing that day based on activities out when they arrived in the classroom. I took her advice and decided to rework my lesson plan format and start of each lesson. First, I rearranged the format to have a spot for the lesson objective for each lesson. I wrote what I wanted the students to be able to do as a result of

the lesson. I was also sure to make each goal measurable. This action would provide evidence of student learning. It not only helped me while writing my lesson plans, but would explicitly remind me of the lesson objective when I quickly glanced at my lesson plans throughout the day. In addition to adding the lesson objectives to my lesson plans, I started involving students at the beginning of the lesson in discussing what we would be learning that day. I also wrote an agenda for the hour on the board when I worked with my largest group of students for small reading group. I told my students, being young first graders, they were being "let in on a secret". This secret was the action they were going to be able to accomplish as a result of the lesson. Students were more engaged from the moment class began since they were aware of the lesson objective, or as they were told, the "secret". The students I work with individually also had fun guessing what they were going to do based on what items were set out. This allowed students to take some responsibility in their learning as well. I was able to ask them what they were learning throughout the lessons and at the end knowing we had discussed the goals at the beginning of class. I learned from my principal the importance of purposefully including the lesson objectives in lesson plans and discussion with students. I believe this is a vital step in the planning process.

In addition to my principal, I utilized collaboration with fellow teachers to learn about the planning process. I asked many experienced teachers what they have found to work best for lesson plans. I looked at their formats, organization, and methods used when they were creating new lessons. It was eye opening to look at all the different methods teachers used. Some of my colleagues used weekly outlines in calendar form while others used daily pages in a binder. Not only did I look at my colleagues' lesson plans, but I met with some to discuss when they arrange their resources and what methods they found most effective in planning lessons and activities. I learned most experienced teachers have their materials and resources organized and packed away in a certain way; some organize items by season, month, unit, or week number. This organization makes planning easier. The teacher already knows where her resources are located for lessons, thus decreasing the time spent searching for materials. This allows more time to spend on planning how to differentiate lesson tailored to specific students within the classroom. Throughout my observations and discussions, I noted the methods I feel would work best for me as I collect materials and resources for my career. As the year comes to a close, I have already started applying some of these organizational techniques as I pack up my classroom. This will hopefully reduce my time spent planning materials to use in lessons and allow me to spend more time collecting student data to drive my differentiated instruction.

Data collection is another resource I employed during the completion of the planning module. Especially with the state and national focus on data driven instruction, this was a vital part of my learning process. As a new teacher, I found it incredibly important to not only be aware of data collection, but actively use data collection in my planning and teaching. My school utilized many different programs to encourage student learning, such as Dibels and Lexia. The Dibels program was a progress monitoring and benchmark assessment tool to track student progress in reading. The skills tested were first sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, and letter name fluency. The data collected on each student was typed into the program website. The information was then presented in a variety of forms, charts, and graphs according to individual students, classes, or grades. I was able to log on the site and collect data on specific students that composed my small groups, both kindergarteners and first graders. This data allowed me to pinpoint where my students were struggling and in what content areas they were excelling. With that information I could then plan activities that were specific to the needs of my students. Just as I used the Dibels program, I also used the Lexia program. This was an online program in which students would log on and complete a variety of activities based on their personal levels in reading. For example, one of my students could be working on silent e and certain sight words while another student worked on words with

double vowels and digraphs. The program works in a way that tracks student progress online. I could log on at any point and get individual reports on every student. I could see the percentages correct and incorrect answers for every concept the student was working on. It also tracked how long a student took on each activity. From that information I could tailor lessons to target the skills my students were struggling with. I was also able to create activities for students to work with independently and interactively. Each student could work on their own activity while I monitored their progress.

Another step in the learning process was to apply what I had learned in reading the book *It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend* by Richard Lavoie. The book discussed the different needs students can have emotionally and socially. When planning lessons for students with special needs, I had to consider much more than just their academic level. I needed to factor in what the student's background included. Did the student have a background of emotional disturbance, have ADHD, or any have trouble connecting with his or her peers? These are just a few of the questions the book made me consider when planning a lesson. For example, I had a student, Andrew, who struggled with working consistently and cooperatively with other students. I was not going to plan and base the entire lesson on partner work. Andrew would have then been concerned and focused on the fact that he had to work with a partner instead of the content being taught. I would slowly allow time for this student to work with his peers, but in small amounts as I taught him social skills. In the same way I considered Andrew's social need I had to consider those students I have with ADHD. These students could not sit for an hour at a desk and work. I needed to make lesson plans that included physical activities that enabled students to get directly involved with the material. Lavoie discusses the necessity of making modifications and adjustments to lessons to include time for students with ADHD to move about. He states when teachers include movement in lesson plans it legitimizes the student's need to move. When planning my lessons, I always had to keep the needs of my students in mind. No matter what the need was, it was an essential part of the planning process. Not only did I learn from Lavoie, but my students were able to be themselves with all their specific needs while learning.

Overall, I have learned the importance of planning in teaching. The time, resources, and energy spent on planning are invaluable. If lessons are planned with the student's needs in mind the lessons will run smoothly and will be effective. Students will not only learn, but enjoy the learning process: As a new teacher, my highest hope is to see my students enjoy the learning process and be inspired to continue their learning outside the classroom walls.