



What Makes this TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

Some specific examples/evidence that contributed to the success of this paper are provided below.

Module Two: Planning

Grade: 7

Subject: Social Studies

Criteria I: Development of New Learning (*How the teacher developed new learning and what was learned*)

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Read the following publications: *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance* - Grant Wiggins ; *Collaborative Analysis of Student Work: Improving Teaching and Learning* – Langer, Colton and Goff ; *Assessing Student Outcomes: Performance Assessment Using the Dimensions of Learning Model*- Marzano, Pickering & McTighe
- Consulted with veteran colleagues

What the teacher learned:

- “Mr. Wiggins makes the case for feedback that is ‘always timely, continual, and user friendly.’ He points out that ‘constant isolated drill work and testing without concurrent feedback means that answers are isolated from actual effects, causes, and purposes in the student’s school experience.’”
- “Planning begins with an achievement target tied to standards. In order for feedback to be effective, students must understand the standards being assessed . . . and feedback must be continually provided during assessment activities for students to self-assess and adjust accordingly.”
- “Performance Assessments offer a variety of tasks and situations to give students opportunities to display their understanding and thoughtfully apply knowledge, skills. The teacher will identify standards to include in the task; revise the task to make these standards explicit.”

Criteria II: Impact on Practice (*How the teacher’s planning practice is different*)

- “Wiggins’ suggestions for providing feedback were incorporated into my American Civil War unit plan. I started first with identifying a priority standard as an achievement target. During the writing/ revising process, I have planned time to conference with students to assess progress and provide feedback.”
- “As a form of CASL, I plan to track my students’ formative assessment results on a chart to have data for exactly where additional support is needed. I will observe ten students closely, assign a series of short formative writing assessments for their portfolio and reflect weekly on their progress.”
- “I planned a culminating performance assessment for my American Civil War unit. The assessment will be tied to C3 standard: D4.6.6-8. The finish product will be a constructed response using information and quotes from a variety of primary and secondary sources available to students.”

Criteria III: Impact on students (*How the teacher anticipates student performance/learning will improve as a result of changes in practice*)

- “By providing conferencing time, students will identify areas for improvement and edit their writing. They will also rely upon and assist members of their cohort group thus providing constant feedback.”
- “I anticipate students will have more clarity about intended learning targets through participating in the process of identifying different strategies to support areas of weakness.”
- “I anticipate that this unit will lead students to a greater understanding and retention of historical content information. Students will retain more knowledge by actively engaging with the material in order to collaboratively undertake a performance task compared to rote memorization of facts for a traditional selected response test.”

Indicator: 3. Teachers plan instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by: Selecting appropriate assessment strategies to monitor ongoing student progress.

Goal:

I will develop a greater understanding of assessment strategies that encourage students to self-assess and that are tied to specific standards-based learning outcomes. As a result, students will engage in more self-reflection and summative assessments will be tied to district standards and goals.

Initial Summary:

Currently, to assess students, I use a small variety of ongoing formative assessment strategies. These include regular selected-response quizzes and constructed responses. I also collect pre and post-test data to track student learning of unit goals and objectives. The district does not currently have a social studies curriculum to follow so I am using self-created benchmarks that are often not tied to district-wide standards. Students are summatively assessed using content-based assessments, which do not measure mastery of skills. Moreover, students are not engaged in self-assessment and receive a rubric with assessment criteria approximately 25% of the time. Additionally, I find that it often takes me over a week's time to return student work with marked feedback and I do not plan time to individually conference with students about their progress on a regular basis.

Reflection Paper:

This past fall I was fortunate enough to attend the annual conference of the National Council for the Social Studies. While there, I attended a number of sessions specifically addressing the question of assessment. This was a particularly "hot topic" in light of the new content standards for social studies known as the College, Career and Civic Life Framework (C3). Although there was no clear consensus among presenters on best practice tied to effectively assessing students' comprehension and mastery of the new standards, there certainly was wide-spread agreement that methods such as selected response/multiple choice were not effective in assessing students' abilities in social studies. Throughout my first year and into my second, multiple-choice assessments have been my principle means of gaging students' mastery of content knowledge and have formed the basis for their numerical grade. I realized that I have largely left out the assessment of skills tied to standards. This being the case, my mentor and I identified 'assessment' as a target area for growth in my professional practice. I will incorporate my new learning into my curricular plans for an upcoming unit of instruction regarding the American Civil War.

To begin this process of developing new learning, I referenced three leading texts on the subject of assessment in education. The first book was *Educative assessment: designing assessments to inform and improve student performance* by Grant Wiggins (1998). In the book, Mr. Wiggins makes the case for feedback that is "always timely, continual, and user friendly" (47). He points out that "constant isolated drill work and testing without concurrent feedback means that answers are isolated from actual effects, causes, and purposes in the student's school experience" (43). Wiggins argues that teachers must begin with an achievement target tied to standards and that, in order for feedback to be effective, students must understand the standards being assessed. This can be accomplished, he posits, by allowing



students to compare their work to exemplars and criteria. In doing so it “enables performers to improve through self-assessment and self-adjustment” (49). Furthermore, he goes to say, “ assessment should improve performance, not just audit it.” (44). That is to say that feedback must be continual and provided during the assessment activities so as to help students self-assess and adjust accordingly.

Wiggins’ suggestions for providing feedback were incorporated into my American Civil War unit plan to be taught in the spring. I believe he addressed a number of gaps I currently have in my planning process. I started first with identifying a priority standard to use as an achievement target. From the C3, I selected the following content standard for the unit as a whole: “*Individually and with others, students... Draw on multiple-disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem*” (D4.6.6-8). To meet this standard, students will write a constructed response to address the compelling question, “Could the civil war have been avoided?” At the start of the unit, I plan to show examples of written responses provided by former students and facilitate a conversation about expectations. During the writing and revising process, I have planned time to conference with students in small cohort groups to assess progress and provide feedback that students can use to improve their responses before final grades are given.

With these planning changes, I anticipate that student research skills will improve and their ability to self-regulate will develop more fully. Students will have a clear idea of how the unit will culminate and why the information and activities along the way are important and help build towards the end product. This sense of purpose will lead to increased engagement. Furthermore, by providing conferencing time, students will identify areas for improvement and edit their writing. They will also rely upon and assist members of their small cohort group through the process thus providing continual ongoing feedback.

To further add new learning, I looked to *Collaborative analysis of student work: improving teaching and learning* by Langer, Colton and Goff (2003). Like Wiggins’, this text also stressed the importance of connecting assessments to standards. The authors go further, however, to promote a system of Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning or CASL to help teachers “gain a deeper understanding of the link between their instruction and their student’s learning around standards-based target learning area” (3). Using this method, teachers utilize collected work samples from target students who are struggling. The work that is collected should be related to the target content-standard being addressed in the lesson and is compiled into a portfolio (3). According to the authors, this system of formative assessment is “designed to help teachers analyze student work to improve instructional decisions and, thus students’ learning” (11). The teacher should use the data collected to practice reflective practices individually and with colleagues to “explore how to move student to the next level” (39).

When planning unit assessments in the past, I have not planned for the time necessary to identify the specific strengths and weaknesses of my struggling students as recommended in *Collaborative analysis of student work*. For my Civil War unit, I plan to track my students’ formative assessment results on a chart in order to have the data necessary to discover exactly where additional instructional support is needed. I have chosen 10 struggling students to be in the observation cohort. I plan to begin with close observation of students and have planned a series of short formative writing assessments to ad



to their respective portfolios of student work. I plan to reflect weekly on their progress individually and with other teachers on my team.

I anticipate that when these changes are put into practice the results will be increased content learning for the majority of at-risk students in the cohort group. Students will be able to view their portfolios during conferencing, and share in the conversation and planning to help them reach learning goals. Moreover, I anticipate that students will have more clarity about intended learning targets through participating in the process of identifying different strategies to support areas of weakness.

The final book I referenced for new learning was *Assessing student outcomes: performance assessment using the dimensions of learning model* by Marzano, Pickering and McTighe (1998). The authors promote the use of performance assessments as an effective alternative to traditional multiple-choice assessments that they describe as, “incapable of revealing in any comprehensive way what students know and can do” (11). They go on to support the claim that assessment practices should, “mirror the learning process” (11). The authors suggest that this theoretical idea is put into practice through performance assessments. This refers to a “variety of tasks and situations in which students are given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and to thoughtfully apply knowledge, skills, and habits of mind in a variety of context” (13). Similar to the other two book sources of new learning, *Assessing student outcomes* stresses the importance of linking standards with assessment. The authors recommend that teachers “identify standards...to include in the task, and revise the task to make these standards explicit” (28).

I drew heavily from this source of new learning to plan a culminating performance assessment for my American Civil War unit. This assessment will be tied directly to the C3 standard identified earlier: D4.6.6-8. Students will answer the unit’s compelling question “Could the Civil War have been avoided?” by examining causation through the 4 disciplinary lenses of the C3: history, civics, geography and economics. The finish product will be a constructed response using information and quotes from a variety of primary and secondary sources available to students. The students will be clear as to the standard we are addressing and have access to exemplars of the finished product. Their progress will be assessed continually throughout the process.

Through this performance task, I anticipate that a greater number of students in the cohort group and the class as a whole will make progress towards stated expectations in standards compared to my usual method of an end-of-the-unit selected response test. Students will potentially increase their ability to self-regulate and assess their own progress through this more engaging style of assessment as it will more closely mirror the learning process and give students feedback along the way.

In addition to book resources, I consulted a number of veteran colleagues for new learning on the subject of planning effective assessment strategies. Upon sharing my plan for the performance assessment with my content supervisor, Mr. S, he suggested the use of rubrics. He went on to say students thrive with very clear expectations and guidelines. Effective rubrics clearly define criteria for emerging, developing, proficient and mastery of standards. The goal for most students is to reach the ‘proficient’ level, which should be calibrated at grade-level standards. Mastery is defined as beyond



grade-level. This specific set-up will align my rubrics to other district-wide rubrics, specifically those used in English-Language Arts.

This guidance proved very helpful as I planned the ongoing formative and summative assessment strategies to be used in my American Civil War unit. I developed two rubrics that I plan to share with students at the outset of the unit. The first is for academic behavior tied to working collaboratively in small groups. This rubric is aligned to the CT Core Standards for Speaking and Listening. The actual standards addressed are included in the language of the rubric. Additionally, I developed a rubric for the performance assessment. Each of the four categories is assigned a number value 1 through 4 and the rubric also includes clear expectations and examples.

I anticipate that these rubrics will prove essential to student achievement and become a daily resource and reference for students who are self-assessing. Students will be clear about the end product. Furthermore, and most importantly perhaps, students will know how they are expected to behave and contribute in a group work setting. They will know that not everyone in the group will receive the same grade and that each student will be assessed individually based on the rubric. I anticipate that this will motivate them to contribute to the final product.

I also had the opportunity to meet with two veteran teachers that were recommended by my administrator as routinely using exemplary assessment strategies in the classroom. The first, Miss J, spoke to the benefits of exit slips. As an 11-year veteran of teaching in the district, she has used exit slip at the high school level and now uses them routinely at the middle school level. She shared numerous examples of slips she has used in the past. They were all on quarter-sized sheets of paper and were of varying lengths and levels of difficulty. The exit slips were all open-ended questions that students were expected to complete in the final 2 minutes of class and hand-in as they exit the classroom. The questions focused on the most important take-away Miss J hoped her students to have. She used the data collected from the slip as a formative assessment that guided whether she should move-on in the curriculum or review the concept or skill again.

I have not used exit slips as a regular feature of my curriculum in the past, but I recognize the value that Miss J's method and style of exit slip would have in my own classroom. Within my upcoming unit on the American Civil War, there are four lessons and within each lesson there are 2-3 supporting questions that guide students towards answering the unit's compelling question. For example: "How did commerce in the North support slavery in the South?" and "What role did abolitionists play in the rising tensions between the North and South?" I plan to give exit slips with each of these questions to ensure students comprehend critical issues related to the causes of the American Civil War before moving on to other key ideas.

I anticipate that students will begin to pay closer attention to the supporting questions as I present them at the start of each lesson within the unit. Students will make note of the answers as we read primary and secondary sources associated with each lesson. Finally, students will have a clearer understanding of the role questioning and inquiry play in historical thought. This is a standard in the C3.



I also discussed with Ms. G her methods of assessment. She provides students ample opportunity to practice self-reflection in her 8th grade science class. She shared with me two reflection prompts. The first was for a writing assignment. She asked a series of questions, which corresponded to criteria set forth in the assignment rubric. Students must circle one of the following for each question: always / sometimes / never. For example, “Did you check for spelling, grammar and punctuation errors before finishing?” Moreover, in the second prompt for lab stations, student had to fill in responses to questions such as “Which part of the assignment did you struggle with the most and why?” Ms. G feels that students benefit when they reflect on the way their choices affect their learning.

In my Civil War unit, I plan to add a reflection prompt for collaboration. The questions will be taken directly from the language of the rubric and address the Speaking and Listening standards in the CT Core Standards. The two priority standards for the district are as follows: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views. To address these standards, I will ask the following questions of students (among others): With your group members, did you ask questions? Answer questions? Stay on topic? Consider other ideas?

Using the reflection prompt, I anticipate that students will make the connection that they are held responsible for their academic conduct. Their behavior will improve during future group work assignments because they realize that working collaboratively is important and valued in the classroom. Also, they will be clear as to the expectation I have for their speaking and listening skills and how it is related to standards for all seventh graders.

I put my new learning into practice by beginning my plans with an achievement target tied to standards. This target will be made explicit in each assignment. Planned changes in my practice will be the addition of detailed responses, rubrics and exit slips for constant assessment. I plan to use this information to give more detailed feedback. I anticipate that this unit will lead students to a greater understanding and retention of historical content information about the American Civil War. Students will retain more knowledge by actively engaging with the material in order to collaboratively undertake a performance task compared to rote memorization of the facts required for a traditional test. I anticipate the ultimate end result will be students who have learned essential academic skills and habits of mind in addition to important historical content knowledge gained from social studies.

