

9. Final Report

1) Students and Instruction:

The students took the RCST pretest A and showed particular weaknesses in recognizing purpose and strategy, reasoning from the text, finding meaning in context, identifying important ideas, and sometimes in sentence control and clarity, grammar, usage, and idiom, and organization and coherence, as well as development and support. Therefore, I targeted these weaknesses, in hopes of addressing them in the module I created that was high interest to them and engaging.

Critical Reading

Overall, students have become more aware of their reading. They now question bias, look at the authority of the author, recognize academic language and understand main points and purposes better. Some are more aware of strategies being used by writers and emotionally charged words, while others are still oblivious to those things. The students participating in the ERWC class, using the target competencies and strategies have become more competent, critical readers.

Academic Writing

Very few use the strategies in their own essays yet, but are now able to identify them in their reading. The participating students have come a long way in one semester and are certifiably more competent writers. The participating students have recognized common errors in writing and they make far fewer grammar and spelling errors in their essays. Their sentence construction has improved. Organization and coherence is the area of greatest improvement: their introductions and thesis statements are stronger and more interesting; they have more facts and examples in the body; their conclusions reflect the material in the essay, and they do not introduce new topics in the conclusion of their essays; they think about use of slang. Although slang is not eliminated from their writing, it occurs far less than at the beginning of the year.

Despite the above stated deficiencies in the reading and writing of the students, they rise to the occasion in our class discussions and are animated in expressing their opinions verbally. I capitalize on this energy to urge them to write powerfully about what they feel. I motivate them by brain storming high-paying jobs which involve excellent writing skills. I also explain the benefit of being able to write a powerful letter to a judge if they should end up in court at any time. I allow debate and discussion in class, and reassure them that they will never be graded down for any opinion they hold; grades will be based only on how well they express and back up their own opinions with the opinions, studies and words of others. This does help correct habitual or unconscious approaches to writing. It also enhances the energy of the learner to take on new and difficult tasks.

2) Leadership: I realized that as a school we had not focused on a college going culture.

I realize how much work we have to do to help our students be prepared. I am pleased with my growth, the overall results of our participation, and the response of my colleagues, both in our school and in the A+ PLUS Consortium. This is one small step in developing better communication to discuss such issues as college going culture and aligning our curriculum to best meet the needs of our learners.

3) Professional Learning: Professional growth

I have new skills in terms of being able to modify my instruction based on looking at my student data. By taking time to look at the strengths and weaknesses of my students, I could craft my unit to address their needs and directly instruct them in areas where they were unsure or unable to do particular activities. Also, I have gotten much better at choosing strategies based on the particular needs of my students.

Because RIAP helped create a forum where I could converse and get ideas from fellow high school and college teachers, the professional skills that I now can say I have learned relate to my own understanding of the difficulty students have with academic language and how to help foster their mastery of it. It gave me many tools and models to improve my own teaching. This study, of my own class and the opportunity to create a module with custom assignments tailored to fit the academic needs of my own group of students was particularly helpful in honing in on critical reading and understanding of the author's meaning and purpose. It also helped me guide my students to be better editors and writers, to organize their essays better, and to try to choose clear, powerful words and phrases in their sentences. Please see the section on Personal Action steps for greater detail about sharing the curriculum with other professionals in education and the community at large.

As I sit here on the last day of RIAP, I reflect on the amazing growth of my students this year. While not all will go to college, at least all are considering the fact they there is such a thing, that they have skills to go, and that they can make that decision even after a time out of high school.