



# IT WORKED!

## *Using Content Discussion Prompts to Understand Content*

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### **Using Content Discussion Prompts to Understand Content**

As a school based Mathematics Resource Teacher, a large part of my role is to facilitate and encourage collaborative planning for grade level math teachers. This collaboration mostly occurred during weekly planning meetings of math teachers including classroom teachers, Title I resource teachers and special educators. As teachers were adjusting to the rigor of the Common Core State Standards, I noticed that the planning conversations often centered on what type of independent seatwork the students would be doing for practice. I was concerned that teachers were not thinking about the standards for instruction or understanding what students would need to know or be able to do to demonstrate mastery of the standards. Before the start of an upcoming unit on fourth grade computation, I was able to schedule a full day of professional development.

In planning for the PD session, I wanted to provide teachers with time to develop a common understanding of the curriculum content standards and long range plan the unit while reviewing resources to use with students. I referred to the “Planning Tool: Content and Worthwhile Tasks Discussion Prompts” in *Mathematics Coaching: Resources and Tools for Coaches and Leaders, K-12* (Williams, McGatha, Kobett & Wray 2014.) This tool provided questions to focus the discussion on the standards and students so the teachers would not feel vulnerable in their understanding of the content.

During professional development, I focused the teachers’ learning with the following questions:

*What are the big ideas of the lesson (or unit)?*

*Which of the lesson objectives are conceptual? Procedural? Higher level thinking? How might the objectives be connected?*

*What will students be able to demonstrate at the end of the lesson and how will you measure understanding?* (Williams, et al., 2014, p. 43)

As the teachers talked about the big ideas and the types of objectives, they were able to come to a common understanding of the standards and expectations for student learning. They also started to look at the unit as connected standards rather than a “checklist” of items to teach. After discussing the questions, the teachers began to focus on selecting tasks for students to meet their instructional needs and the rigor of the curriculum. Teachers discussed and planned for the questions they would ask students during instruction. This was a big change from the planning conversations about independent student work!

In the weeks to come after the professional development session, the team continued to plan together but the emphasis changed. The teachers planned weekly instructional goals based on the standards. They decided on common formative assessments and discussed changes that needed to be made to instruction based on the students’ understanding of the concepts.

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