
The development of Focus Group Lesson Plans will equip you with a set of specific lessons to provide targeted remediation to students based on their individual strengths and weaknesses as identified through MAP testing. The plans will address skills necessary for content mastery and provide for optimal academic student growth. The plans are designed to be utilized in a twenty to thirty minute setting for student groups based on RIT scores in intervals of ten. The plans help remove the obstacle for the classroom teacher to address students in their zone of proximal development, rather than the one size fits all approach to remediation.

Getting Started

The creation of focus group lessons can be a valuable staff development exercise for content area experts in grades 3-12. This process can help teachers better understand the hierarchy of understanding within a given domain. Focus group lessons strive to capture the essence of a topic through direct instruction and explicit student practice.

In order to get started with creating your own set of Focus Group Lessons, you will first need to create a Content Expert Team.

CONTENT EXPERT TEAMS:

The lessons will only be as good as your content expert team. It is important to select individuals that understand the importance of addressing students in their zone of proximal development.

1. Select a group of two or three content exemplars from grades three through five, six through eight, and nine through twelve.
2. Discuss with the exemplar teams the importance of following a model of direct instruction, with the teacher modeling thought and skill processes, guided practice and individual practice.
3. It is important to direct exemplar teams to create lessons that can be delivered by any certified teacher regardless of teacher certification area.
4. Ask the exemplar teams to analyze the corresponding DesCartes RIT range and look for overlap between RIT groups. The overlap usually indicates an essential skill required for mastery of the content strand. Use these skills as a starting point for objectives to address in focus group lessons.

FOCUS GROUP LESSONS:

The teams will work to develop lesson plans that address specific DesCartes Learning objectives and maximize student growth while providing direct instruction and guided practice for the students.

1. Create lessons that utilize technology and interactive content, in order to provide a fresh approach to the content.
2. Try to utilize backgrounds with soft pastel colors and fonts like Comic Sans, Times New Roman, etc. that are based on block letters.
3. Always try to keep text size where it is easy to read from various locations within a classroom. Avoid using font colors that are difficult to read with different color backgrounds.
4. Be consistent with colors, backgrounds, font size, and font style.
5. Limit the amount of text on one page to help make the lessons accessible to struggling readers.
6. When selecting reading passages, select developmentally appropriate passages that are within the correct Lexile range for the particular RIT band.
7. Determine the number of focus group lessons necessary to fit your school calendar. Select DesCartes objectives that address state content learner standards, in order to maximize the student growth on MAP and state accountability assessments.
8. Try to create a twenty to thirty minute lesson that is focused on the DesCartes objective.
9. Eliminate fluff!

TEACHER LESSON PLAN:

The team will want to create an excellent lesson plan that will be easy to follow and help alleviate any anxiety the teacher may have about instructing based on RIT groups. The plan should be easily accessible to the teachers and include any information the teacher may need in order to be successful instructing students on the objectives.

1. Create a detailed teacher lesson plan to accompany each lesson so that someone could pick up the plan and deliver the lesson.
2. On the lesson plan, include DesCartes objective, RIT range, and any supplemental materials needed for the lesson.
3. Include page-by-page instructions on how the teacher and student needs to interact with the material covered in the lesson.

4. Include answers to the questions covered in the lessons and any background information the teacher needs to be aware of before instructing the desired objective.
-

Next Steps

Once the team has completed the lesson plans, find the most accessible format to provide access to the lessons. It might be helpful to post the lessons on an intranet or website. Demonstrate the power of your lessons to special education, English as Second Language teachers, administrative staff, and general education teachers. Monitor the usage of your lessons and fine tune lessons in order to make enhancements.

Resources

Rely on the content teams to provide their “tricks of the trade” to personalize your lessons. Online databases such as DISCUS and EBSCO can serve as valuable resources for print media in the creation of reading lessons. The DesCartes Learning Objectives are invaluable throughout the creation of Focus Group Lesson Plans.

Help

Check back with the Spark Community to participate in a blog conversation with Jane Harrison, Director of Elementary Education, and Christie Shealy, Coordinator of District Testing, from Anderson School District One in South Carolina.

SMARTBoard Software

Anderson School District One uses interactive whiteboards by SMARTBoard. The software is available as a free download on the website www.smarttech.com. One would need to follow the site to software downloads and follow the onscreen instructions for downloading the SMART Notebook software. The SMARTBoard software can be used on any interactive whiteboard. With a computer and LCD projector, anyone can use the SMARTBoard software to make an otherwise plain lesson an interactive trip to knowledge. The SMART Notebook software allows the RIT lesson plans to come alive for opportunities of student

engagement and interactivity with content that can often times be dull. Using features like “click and reveal” boxes to reveal hints, steps, and answers help students stay engaged during lessons. Students become willing volunteers for the opportunity to write on an interactive whiteboard.

Digging Into Data

The MAP testing series provides a rich bank of data for analyzing student strengths and weaknesses. When the test data is combined with federal accountability measures, one can develop a strong plan of school improvement. Performance data reported for federal Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) purposes can serve as a wellspring of improvement. As AYP measures strive for continuous improvement, one measure calls for a ten percent improvement in students scoring proficient and advanced in English Language Arts and mathematics. The ten percent improvement provides schools with a tangible mark of improvement. Schools can determine the exact value of improvement needed and in conjunction with the MAP test alignment studies and recent testing data, can translate the desired improvement into a list of students that are ready to help the school reach their ten percent improvement. Further information about interpreting MAP data for continuous school improvement will be discussed in an upcoming blog session.

When combining MAP test data with NWEA state alignment studies, schools can create a school wide list of students ranked by MAP test scores. The data will become essential in creating RIT groups for remediation. Determine the number of students within each RIT range, for example 171-180, 181-190, 191-200, etc. To allow for maximum interaction with the teacher and student, strive to keep twelve to fifteen students in the group. Strategic placement of teachers with particular groups will help maximize the student growth each group will experience.