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Readers React

April 2021 | The Empowered Principal

Powerful Pieces

The April issue looks like a winner for school leaders. I see that my peeps, Robyn Jackson (@Robyn_Mindsteps), Sanee Bell (@SaneeBell), and Mark Anthony Gooden (@GoodenPhD) have articles in this issue. I'm looking forward to this one. 🐦

Baruti K. Kafele (@PrincipalKafele)

Every month, *EL* magazine offers up something good, but I am really digging April's theme. I catch myself doing a lot of head nods. 🐦

Shaune Beatty (@ShauneBeatty)

This month's *EL* magazine is full of great articles for school leaders. Providing tools, resources, and ideas to lead change in our schools. 🐦

Yesenia Mccleskey (@Ymcclesk34)

Double Take

Oh, hey, representation! Thanks for this month's edition, ASCD. 🐦

Micah B. Harris (@MBH_Lead2Learn)

Principal Matters

A great study! ["What Great Principals Really Do" by Jason A. Grissom, Anna J. Egalite and Constance A. Lindsay] The principal matters! I was happy to see the study draw out the importance of people skills. An often overlooked and underestimated skill. Great leaders leverage this skill to galvanize the belief, efforts, and contributions of others to achieve a shared vision. 🐦

Jennifer Collier (@drjencollier)

Love (or dislike) something in a recent issue of *EL*? We want to hear about it! Write to us at edleadership@ascd.org or on Twitter @ELmagazine. Printed reactions may be edited for clarity and length.

Great Observation

A fabulous article that emphasizes bringing evidence to a conversation and opening it up for the teacher to share what they notice/wonder ["Making Classroom Observations Matter" by Lynda Tredway, Matt Militello and Ken Simon]. Creating this space for teachers leads to deeper reflection and changes to practice. 🐦

Jenna Moller (@jenna_moller)

All About the Vision

Intriguing article ["The Most Powerful Tool in a Principal's Arsenal" by Robyn Jackson]. Challenges the historic practice of shared visioning. Not 100 percent convinced but intrigued. Parallels with the best athletic coaches—establish vision and get players to buy in. 🐦

Wade Smith (@WallaWallaSup)

Be the Leader You Want to Be

Pretty great read ["What Kind of Leader Are You?" by Bryan Goodwin and Kent Davis]. As we are recovering from a pandemic, what kind of leader do you want to be... transformational or transactional? 🐦

David Huber (@DavidJHuber)

People first! There are so many nice reminders in Goodwin and Davis's article. Remember to establish trust and build capacity in your team. Then, no matter what beasts lurk before you, y'all can get through it... together! 🐦

Pete Hall (@educationhall)

Ending on a Good Note

This ["Getting the Endings Right" by Matthew R. Kay] is one of the most brilliant and important things I've ever read in *EL* magazine. Really. 🐦

Brian Conant (@conantbrianedu)

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Instructional Planning in a New Landscape

In planning *Educational Leadership's* free, online-only summer issue each year, we typically try to pick a theme that we think will resonate with educators as they prepare for the upcoming school year. Given the situation this year, as schools seek to regroup after more than a year of pandemic-shaped learning conditions, the possibilities were both limitless and difficult to isolate. In the end, we decided to go back to the basics and focus on something that we know will be at the heart of effective schooling, whatever its shape or form: instructional planning.

As you will recognize as you read the stories in this issue, this is hardly a side topic in the current environment. Initiatives to address so-called "learning loss" or instructional gaps from disrupted school routines implicitly depend on effective lesson and unit planning. So, too, do decisions on what to carry over and build on from educators' mass experiment with remote learning. Indeed, it's likely that schools' recovery from the pandemic will entail a strong focus on the nuts and bolts—and nuances—of instructional planning in a changing landscape. To some degree, this is already happening.

In our opening article, for example, Monica Burns offers tips on planning lessons that integrate some of the "tech-infused instructional strategies" educators adopted out of necessity during remote learning. For Burns, the return to "normal" shouldn't mean going back to stale "best practices" and abandoning dynamic online discussions, open-ended content-creation platforms, or digital resource curation. Instead, it's an opportunity to be more intentional about using technology in lessons—a point that is echoed in Jane E. Pollock, Laura J. Tolone, and Gary S. Nunnally's article on spurring student creativity.

In his piece, instructional coach Craig Simmons tackles the other big issue facing educators as they prepare for the next school year: addressing potential instructional gaps or disruptions from the previous year. As Simmons describes it, this will entail cross-grade-level collaboration among teacher teams, prioritization of essential standards, creation of well-calibrated pacing maps, and a focus on acceleration rather than remediation—in other words, intensive and multifaceted instructional planning. "Now more than ever," he writes, "it is imperative that we are strategic and intentional in our instructional planning decisions."
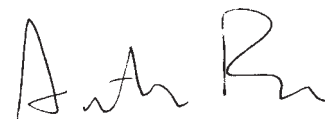
These themes of instructional sequencing and alignment are sounded as well in Jay McTighe's article on evaluating curriculum units and Tim Westerberg's guidelines on designing standards-based units. This year especially, lesson planning can't be a one-off matter.

Adapting to Students' Needs
Other articles in the issue look at specific aspects of lesson planning that could play a critical role in adapting instruction to students' needs or making content more engaging, accessible, and "sticky" in the year ahead. Lee Ann Jung outlines practical ideas for integrating principles from Universal Design for Learning to create more inclusive and adaptable lessons. Amir Rasooli and Susan M. Brookhart offer guidelines for making small-group instruction actually work. (Hint: Don't just do it because you think it's good for students—and don't give whole-group grades.) And Henry Seton shares a plan he devised for putting "more rigor and urgency" into Socratic seminars, or student-led discussions.

Summer planning will be filled with uncertainties and complexities for educators this year. But we hope this issue addresses some of your core needs, gets you excited about possibilities, and helps you focus on issues you can control, such as the quality and depth of instruction. Those are things we *know* kids will need in the fall. **EL**

Planning Technology Integration for In-Person Instruction

Strategic and resourceful use of technology doesn't have to disappear once distance learning does.

Monica Burns

What does technology integration look like after more than a year of remote learning? As schools shift back to in-person instruction, there are certain aspects of remote learning worth holding onto. From the use of digital tools to foster collaboration to the quick availability of presentation and publishing programs, some components of online teaching and learning have a place in traditional classroom settings.

Of course, many teachers were using technology to help accomplish learning goals well before the pandemic. But the wider adoption of tech-infused instructional practices has put all members of a school community in a position to have deeper conversations around technology integration than might have felt possible in the past. Remote settings this past year have given more classroom teachers and school administrators context and experience with how digital tools can facilitate teaching and learning.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we've often heard calls to "get back to normal." Both you and your students might be

ready to embrace learning experiences that weren't possible when learning at home, such as hands-on learning activities with supplies only a school environment can supply.

There are many aspects of in-person instruction well worth returning to. In shared physical spaces for collaborative learning, students can move around a room and have a better sense of non-verbal cues and body language as they work together. However, this is also a moment to make changes and to let go of "best practices" that aren't actually working. We can also incorporate the practices from digital classrooms that students loved or those we know had a positive effect on student engagement. The opportunities for online discussions, collaboration between students, and online publication and celebration of student work have increased greatly.

Your "tech tool belt" has probably grown this past year to include new apps and websites, so a shift back to in-person instruction must include reflection about which tools to keep and which ones to toss aside. Here are three lesson-planning tips for strategic, intentional technology integration.

1

Use Thoughtful Curation for In-Class Resources

Handpicking resources is not a novel idea, but digital tools can make it easier to locate and share resources with students. The quality of digital resources available for students varies greatly, with many options for video, audio,

In addition to the collective knowledge shared among your colleagues over the past year, you may have found that you more regularly looked beyond your school for support and inspiration.

and text-based resources. The best resources for your own classroom or group of students might be different than the best resources for another group—even if the subject matter or course goals are identical on the surface. The combination of determining individual students' needs with a search for high-quality resources is what curation is all about.

I often use the phrase "tasks before apps" when having this conversation with educators, meaning you should first take a moment to think about your primary goals for sharing a resource with your students. Goals might include providing background information, introducing new vocabulary, or making a connection between a high-interest topic and personal experience. Then, consider the type of media available and why something like a podcast episode, explainer video, or online current events article might be the best fit.

As you lesson plan this year, you might decide to post two or three different resources for students, based on their needs, in an online space. For example, if you know your students are often talking about what is happening in the world or in the news, pulling a current events article from Newsela and using that text to explore an ELA topic (instead of the passage you've used in years past) is a great way to leverage media available through an Internet search and pique students' growing curiosity. Or, before a lesson, you might search through TED-Ed's website or a favorite YouTube channel for a video that will introduce a topic for an upcoming lesson.

A key piece of an effective curation strategy is making sure the resources you share with students are well-organized and easily accessible for everyone. You can create a single place to keep resources and links organized in a platform where students access shared content, such as a Schoology collection or in the "Materials" section of Google Classroom.

2

Embrace Open-Ended Creation Tools

An open-ended creation tool, like Adobe Spark, Book Creator, Buncee, or MS Sway, lets students create a product reflecting their learning and gives them a blank canvas as creators to make their own movies, websites, or podcasts. I sometimes think of these spaces as an opportunity to "choose your own adventure." Both teachers and students can craft a unique experience inside such spaces to demonstrate their learning.

Although each creation tool employs different ways to have students show what they know, these tools usually include an option for students to record audio or use a voice-to-text feature that turns a recording into a typed paragraph. Some (like Seesaw and Flipgrid) also have features like video recording and the ability to draw an illustration or annotate a picture or piece of text. These types of tools are perfect for differentiating learning experiences for students and can help level the playing field for kids who shine when given the option to share their learning in nontraditional ways.

Giving students time to think deeply about their learning experience is a pre-COVID best practice that should stay, but you might embrace even more ways for them to structure that reflection and build skills in the upcoming school year. We'll want to hold onto the student choice that's often inherent in distance learning. A student who is hesitant to stand up and speak in front of their classmates might now

prefer the option to share an idea with a video recording tool like Flipgrid. Or, instead of returning to weekly multiple-choice quizzes that limit student responses, formative assessment could involve a routine for students to respond to open-ended questions with their choice of a text, video, or audio.

I saw many students thrive this past year when given more options and support for sharing their learning in digital spaces. I worked with a student who used Book Creator to create an e-book reflecting on her reading experience. In the past, a composition notebook might have been the only place for her to jot down a summary or lingering questions, but this space gave her more options to respond and an extra layer of creativity, and it made it easy for me to see her work in real time, even though we were connecting virtually and miles apart.

Another reason to incorporate open-ended creation tools into your lesson planning is the ease and time-saving efficiency of using the same tool for multiple projects throughout the school year. If you are planning as a grade-level team or department, you might look at the curriculum map for your year together and decide what types of activities you will revisit more than once. Instead of introducing one tool in September for a project and another tool in January for a similar project, you can choose a tool that is flexible enough to appear in multiple lessons.

One of my favorite examples from this year is Google Jamboard, a free whiteboard space that students can use individually or to collaborate with their peers. They have options to search for images or add virtual sticky notes, text, and annotations. They can brainstorm, create mind maps, and discuss ideas with classmates. A consistently used digital space also provides the ability to access notes, templates, and supporting resources from multiple devices, easily color code, and add links to additional resources. Not to mention, if this fall your school has students who are learning at home as well as in the physical classroom, everyone can access the same Jamboard space at the same time.

3
Find a Faraway Partner-in-Tech

The use of video conferencing tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet has skyrocketed in the past year. Although you probably find that your "Zoom fatigue" is at an all-time high right now, you might want to consider
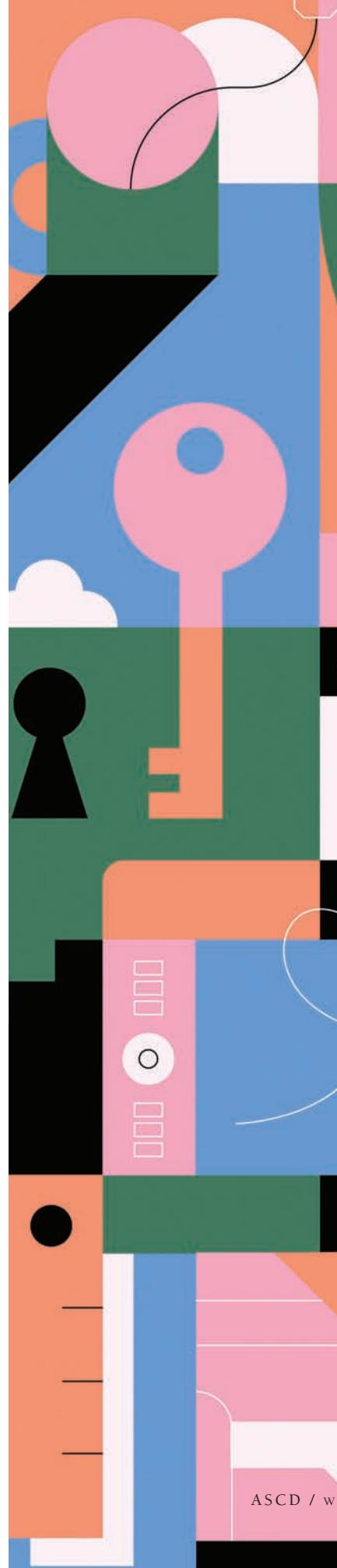
> **Your "tech tool belt" has probably grown this past year to include new apps and websites, so a shift back to in-person instruction must include reflection about which tools to keep and which ones to toss aside.**

using video conferencing in new ways during the upcoming school year, especially if you resume in-person instruction full-time.

In addition to tapping the collective knowledge shared among your colleagues over the past year, you may have found that you more regularly looked beyond your school for support and inspiration. Perhaps you found a fellow 9th grade teacher on Instagram and conversed with them about how to support your biology students' online lab simulations, using ideas no one else in your own school had explored yet. Or maybe you connected with a teacher in a Facebook group who also uses Seesaw to organize differentiated assignments.

I suggest finding one or more faraway "partners-in-tech" for brainstorming and sharing ideas throughout the year, if you don't already have them. Your partners-in-tech could be educators you have known for years or people you first connected with on Clubhouse or Twitter. A partner-in-tech can serve as an accountability buddy, especially if you are both committed to trying out something new and want weekly check-ins, or as a fellow lesson planner, or as someone to bounce ideas off of while addressing common or complimentary goals for tech-friendly instruction.

Though these partnerships might have formed because of distance learning, they don't have to disappear as you resume in-person instruction. You can maintain extended professional cohorts, using virtual connections, to complement partnerships you have with your own colleagues.

Keep Your "Tech Tool Belt" Buckled

The past year has posed many serious challenges for educators—and nobody would want to return to those circumstances. But our imposed reliance on technology has also presented us with the chance to plan with intentionality and ensure students have an opportunity to explore essential, tech-friendly learning experiences. Let's not squander the opportunity. **EL**

REFLECT & DISCUSS

What are the most practical tools you added to your "tech tool belt" this year? How might you incorporate them into in-person learning?

What's the most valuable lesson you've learned about how to apply technology to teaching practices this year?

In what ways might a district harness educators' collective learning and use of pandemic-era technology to implement best practices across the school building?

Monica Burns is an EdTech and Curriculum Consultant, ASCD author and faculty member, and former New York City public school teacher. She is the author of the ASCD Quick Reference Guides *Classroom Technology Tips* and *Distance Learning Essentials*, and the book *Tasks Before Apps* (ASCD, 2017). Her upcoming book, *EdTech Essentials: The Top 10 Technology Strategies for All Learning Environments*, will be published by ASCD in July 2021. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @ClassTechTips.

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Instructional Planning After a Year of Uncertainty

During pandemic recovery, schools must be especially intentional about planning and pacing.

Craig Simmons

Oh, how things have changed. I never thought we would be in a virtual teaching space for this long. One pandemic year down and another school year quickly approaching. As many educators prepare to return in-person full-time this fall, there is one thing weighing heavy on our minds: How are we even possibly going to mitigate the likely gaps in students' progress?

During the transition from brick-and-mortar to virtual learning, I visited Zoom classrooms every day as a turnaround instructional coach. I saw firsthand how teachers quickly adjusted their instruction to meet the new demands of pandemic teaching. I saw their creativity in the use of instructional materials and the presentation of instructional content. But I also saw the stress on teachers' faces as they struggled to keep up with the academic demands of a "typical" school year, although nothing about this past year has been typical. Even in the early months of the pandemic, teachers felt like they were falling behind (Mader, 2021). Schools struggled to keep up with pacing, and student participation—whether it was in the form of student engagement during class, work completion, or attendance—was dwindling.

Although there has been much debate about how we conceptualize "learning loss" and the degree to which the pandemic has affected it (Dickler, 2021; Jacobson, 2021; Strauss, 2021), one thing is certain: the pandemic has likely exacerbated the instructional gaps that students *already* had, especially in the case of those who attend under-resourced schools and whose families or communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that we are strategic and intentional in our instructional planning decisions. While there have been variables outside of our control, such as economic issues and technical difficulties facing families, a variable that we *can* indeed control is the quality of instruction we provide to students. Now especially, it is incumbent upon us to do so.

Planning Starts in PLCs

Since the beginning of last school year, I've been inundated with emails from education companies promoting their wares to help schools close pandemic-related learning gaps. When it comes to student learning, however, I can't help but think about the more pivotal role *teacher collaboration* will play in mitigating instructional gaps this school year. One way that schools can get instructional planning right is by implementing vertical and horizontal professional learning communities (PLCs).

As we know, PLCs are collaborative educator teams that ensure all students learn by establishing a common mission and vision and shared values and goals; building collective knowledge; centering work and discussions on continuous improvement, student learning, and results; and being action oriented.

These learning communities were critical to student success prior to the pandemic, and they will be even more critical in the years to come. Why, exactly? Because this will be the first time in our careers that we will be responsible

for recovering from such an enormous academic disruption. The days ahead will require an unprecedented level of collaboration, intentionality, and intensity from school faculty. The synergy that happens among teachers in well-run PLCs, in particular, can facilitate the kind of knowledge sharing and collective problem solving that will be necessary to positively impact teaching and learning.

Vertical Planning Teams

Curriculum alignment requires teachers to collaborate with other teachers in grades below and above the grade they teach. The collaboration that takes place in vertical planning teams yields pertinent, qualitative information about instruction and student learning that teachers can only get from colleagues in different grades. In the case of planning for learning gaps and learning loss, in the immediate and long-term, vertical teams will play a critical role.

Vertical planning teams will need to spend more time this year planning to make up for lost ground. Specifically, they will need to:

■ Identify and discuss *essential* standards (more on that later) that connect between grade levels.

■ Identify and discuss gaps in the essential standards between grade levels. For example, a gap can occur when (1) content previously taught at one grade level is now included in the standards of an earlier grade level, (2) previous grade-level standards don't fully prepare students for mastery of the standards in the subsequent grade(s), and (3) content skips grades (like when something is taught in 5th grade and not taught again until 7th grade).

■ Discuss what needs to be done to strengthen the coherence in the standards between the two grade levels. This will help prevent future learning gaps from surfacing because of holes in the cohesion of the curriculum.

■ Discuss essential standards that were not taught in the previous grade due to pandemic-related disruptions. Teams can use this qualitative data when planning for gaps.

■ Discuss students' readiness—the challenges they had with grade-level standards, and misconceptions students had at the end of the school year. Did the students master the prerequisite content? Do they have the knowledge and skills needed to begin mastering new content?

Coupling the qualitative data from these vertical planning conversations with quantitative assessment data will give teachers a better understanding of what students know and can do, as well as what students will need to know and be able to do.

Vertical planning impacts learning for *all* students by providing horizontal, grade-level teams with the information they need to fill gaps. When horizontal teams don't collaborate with teams above and below the grade they teach, teachers are forced to make assumptions about what their students have learned, especially when quantitative data is the sole source of information. With vertical planning, however, horizontal teams can make better informed decisions.

Horizontal Planning Teams

Made up of teachers who teach the same grade level, horizontal planning teams engage in ongoing collaboration to strengthen teaching and continuously improve student learning. In thinking about the multilayered work that teachers will have to tackle this upcoming school year (addressing previous grade-level standards, current grade-level standards, and varying differences in learning loss), before developing specific instructional plans, horizontal collaborative teams must spend time answering these critical questions:

1. What are students expected to learn (with a focus on the content that is essential)?

2. How much time will we allot to teaching the essential standards?

3. How will we address the non-essential standards?

4. How will we know that students learned the essential content?

5. What learning experiences will we plan to support learning the essential content?

6. What will we do for students who struggle and those who excel?

7. What can we do to stay on pace?

In my work as an instructional coach and teaching and learning consultant, I've found that schools that have a large percentage of students with learning gaps and/or schools that get far behind in pacing do so because they don't make time to reflect on these kinds of questions. Instead, these schools go into the year without a plan and end up scrambling to teach essential standards or complex concepts.

Back to the Essentials

So, what is *essential* content? First, it is important to note that the terms *essential standards* (or "power standards") and *essential content* are often used interchangeably. However, I believe a nuance exists between the two. For example, consider a representative essential standard:

divide whole numbers using the standard algorithm. When teaching this standard, in addition to teaching the algorithm, some teachers might include a focus on (and assess) students being able to define the terms *dividend*, *divisor*, and *quotient*. While memorizing these definitions won't adversely impact student learning,

being able to define them won't impact student mastery. Therefore, these definitions would be considered non-essential content (and teaching them might adversely impact pacing) when teaching the essential standard.

Essential content is the requisite knowledge and skills students need to demonstrate mastery of the standard. Teachers determine the essential content by unpacking the standard and determining exactly what it is that students need to know, understand, and be able to do to demonstrate mastery.

Horizontal teams can identify essential standards using the REAL criteria, created by Horrell and Many (2014). REAL stands for:

■ **R**eadiness: Requisite knowledge and skills students need for subsequent grades, courses, or classes.

■ **E**ndurance: Knowledge and skills students will be able to use beyond their schooling.

■ **A**ssessed: Knowledge and skills that will be assessed on high-stakes tests.

Focusing on remediation before moving on to grade-level standards isn't the answer.

■ Leverage: Knowledge and skills that can be applied across disciplines.

Identifying essential standards and content will give schools the information they need to effectively plan for the multilayered work and pacing of instruction. This doesn't mean that teachers don't teach non-essential standards and content; what it does mean is that these things aren't instructional priorities.

PLCs were critical to student success prior to the pandemic, and they will be even more critical in the years to come.

Determining essential standards and content shouldn't be an arduous process. It can, however, become difficult to do when teachers have differences in opinion about which standards have endurance, readiness, and leverage—and which standards don't. To minimize conflict, I recommend that PLCs have a process in place for making decisions when all parties are not in agreement. Regardless of how challenging identifying essential standards becomes, collaborative teams must do the work. As noted in Horrell and Many (2014), the "instruction of essential concepts and skills is more effective than superficially 'covering' every concept in the textbook."

Once horizontal teams identify essential standards and content, they can begin mapping out the year.

Mapping Out the Year

Developing carefully thought-out instructional calendars is a key way for schools to plan for the pacing of instruction. When schools don't plan

for pacing, they inadvertently plan to get off pace. To increase the chance of staying on pace, horizontal teams need to map out the school year by creating instructional calendars that indicate *what* they will teach, *when* they will teach it, and for *how long* they will teach it. Unlike in previous years, developing instructional calendars might be a more complex undertaking this year, because teams will likely have to fit in some previous grade-level content. When creating these calendars, horizontal teams also need to build in days for reteaching.

Triangulating the Data

I sometimes hear educators say that "data tells a story." This is only partially true. In fact, data only tells a story when we consider more than one data source or data point; this is known as data triangulation (in this case, the prefix, tri-, doesn't mean three). Unlike what is gleaned from a single data source or data point, data triangulation yields consistencies and inconsistencies about what students know and can do, which is critical when it comes to planning for learning.

Too often students are placed in remedial classes or inappropriate reading and math groups due to specious conclusions that are made based upon one data source or data point. To avoid this, we must spend time triangulating data to ensure

that we provide all students with appropriate instruction that is aligned to their needs. This means that we need to consider quantitative and qualitative data, including end-of-year test scores, universal screening data, pre-assessment data, and teacher input.

Pre-Assessment for Learning

This year especially, we don't have time to waste. And we need to use the time that we do have strategically. Reteaching material that students already know and teaching remedial skills before moving on to grade-level content are not best practices. Unfortunately, this type of instruction happens all the time, exacerbating delays in student progress. This school year—and for as long as we teach students—I recommend that we make pre-assessment a regular practice.

Teachers can pre-assess before they teach a new standard or unit that is composed of several standards. Pre-assessments don't have to be long. For example, in a subject like science, teachers can task students with explaining why some places have four seasons to determine what they know about the Earth's tilt and orbit.

A few questions or a well-designed task that addresses the standards can provide useful information to inform instruction, allowing teachers to answer the following questions:

1. What do my students already know?

2. What can my students do?

3. What learning gaps and misconceptions do my students have that will interfere with their mastery of the upcoming standard(s)?

4. How will I address misconceptions and close learning gaps so that

my students experience success with the upcoming standard(s)?

5. What will I do for students who already know the content?

These assessments for learning provide teachers with the answers they need not only to plan for whole-group instruction, but also to address students' individual learning needs.

Accelerating Learning

As I mentioned, focusing on remediation before moving on to grade-level standards isn't the answer. Instead, schools should focus on acceleration (Rollins, 2014). In this case, to accelerate doesn't mean to go faster; it means teaching remedial content or pre-requisite content in context—when it is needed—as opposed to teaching it in isolation before moving on to grade-level standards. Well-designed pre-assessments will give teachers valuable information to teach students the remedial skills they'll need to be successful with grade-level expectations.

Checking for Understanding

Have you ever created and implemented an engaging, standards-aligned lesson and discovered at the end that students just *didn't get it?* If so, it was probably because you didn't plan to check for understanding *during* the lesson. Waiting until the end of a lesson to check for understanding is too late. Checking for understanding throughout the lesson will provide formative, real-time data, enabling you to make quick instructional pivots that are intentional and aligned to students' immediate instructional needs.

Asking questions and having students demonstrate their learning by showing their work are two easy and

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REFLECT & DISCUSS

How will vertical and horizontal PLC planning play a role in making up for your students' pandemic-related instructional gaps?

———————————

How might the REAL criteria, described here, help you determine what *essential* content should be covered?

———————————

What planning can you and your colleagues do prior to next school year to address potential instructional gaps?

---

effective ways to check for understanding during a lesson. Be sure to sequence the questions and tasks in a logical order so that students move along a progression of learning. Plan to ask essential questions or have students show their work after each critical idea, concept, or skill you expect them to master by the end of the lesson.

All that being said, checking for understanding at the end of a lesson is just as important. Be sure to collect evidence that shows what students know and can do at the end of the lesson. This is the data you're going to use to make adjustments to upcoming lessons and activities.

Successfully getting through each lesson is every teacher's goal. However, a lesson can only be considered a success when students demonstrate that they learned the intended outcomes—the lesson's objective.

The Road to Recovery

Since the pandemic began, there has been much speculation about its long-term impact on student learning. While we don't quite know the extent of learning loss students will have experienced, we do know that we have to do something to address it. The instructional planning teachers do in PLCs will be crucial to pandemic recovery. With the positive interdependence and focus on planning and problems of practice that characterize professional learning communities, I am confident that we can recover what was lost and fill the gaps. **EL**

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Craig Simmons is a turnaround instructional coach in Atlanta Public Schools and owner of CAP Curriculum Educational Consulting and Services, LLC. Follow him on Twitter @_craigasimmons.

How Innovative Teachers Can Start Teaching Innovation

Three ways to enhance your lesson planning to generate creative thinking.

Jane E. Pollock, Laura J. Tolone, and Gary S. Nunnally

Without question, 2020 was a year for innovative teaching. The teachers we worked with in professional development sessions around the world wholeheartedly plunged into hybrid schedules, synchronous teaching, and asynchronous classes. They experimented with blended learning, hoping the models that propose individualization using digital resources would increase student engagement, creativity, and higher-order thinking. Teachers pored over online resources to solve problems and made decisions about how to use technology to motivate students.

As teachers used digital programs and video, they sought feedback and revised their teaching; in short, they innovated. Tyler Douglas, a history teacher we worked with, admitted that prior to the pandemic, he considered technology-assisted instruction optional

in conjunction with in-person teaching; now, he believes blended learning is here to stay.

His question to us was: Did that year of innovative teaching result in students learning to be more innovative, too? In other words, since teachers experimented, solved problems, and made decisions about using technology, was it true that students also developed those same critical and creative thinking skills?

Innovative teaching means the teacher is the creator, but unfortunately it does not necessarily mean the same for the students. Innovation is not just *doing* something new; it is *thinking* of new ways to improve a product, a method, or an idea. How can educators like Tyler teach students to become better innovators themselves? We believe there are three key adjustments to lesson planning that can help them: (1) teach declarative knowledge so that it sticks, (2) teach thinking skills explicitly, and (3) use technology to maximize access to information.

①

Teach Declarative Knowledge So It Sticks

Neuroscientists confirm that structural components of the human brain uniquely process different types of knowledge. For instance, procedural knowledge, such as reading, computing, singing, and drawing, is best learned through practice. This type of skill-based knowledge can be hard to learn because it requires a lot of practice, but it is also hard to forget. Once you have learned how to ride a bike, you have learned how to ride a bike forever. The result of

Did the last year of innovative teaching result in students learning to be more innovative, too?

successful practice is the ability to replicate the procedural knowledge.

When the "practice" approach is used for declarative knowledge—such as facts, concepts, and information—however, the result is memorization, and usually only for the short-term. Do you remember studying the content for a test and forgetting it within a few days? Most students feel the same way.

In contrast to procedural knowledge, declarative knowledge is easy to learn and just as easy to forget. So let's consider: Is it important for declarative knowledge to be retained in long-term memory—and, if so, why?

In his book, *The New Executive Brain: Frontal Lobes in a Complex World*, Elkhonon Goldberg (2009) describes the brain as an orchestra, with the pre-frontal cortex as the conductor. He observes that the fortuitous "emergence of language and the advent of the frontal lobes" contribute to how we connect new sensory data and declarative knowledge with our previous experiences to make meaning (p. 23). This generative transformation, or thinking, leads to new ideas, or innovation. And it makes sense that the more knowledge you retain, the more productive your thinking. Indeed, we believe that teaching declarative knowledge so that it sticks—so that it is retained in long-term memory—is a cornerstone of innovative thinking.

Figure 1 - GANAG: 5 Steps for Every Lesson

Research suggests techniques to help students remember material better. In *Classroom Instruction That Works*, one author of this article (Jane Pollock) and her colleagues introduced nine high-yield strategies teachers can teach students to help them retain information (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). In order of effectiveness, they are: identify similarities and differences; summarize and take notes; reinforce effort; practice; use non-linguistic representations; use cooperative learning; set objectives and feedback; generate and test hypotheses; and employ questions, cues, and advance organizers. A teacher should plan lessons to ensure that students regularly use these high-yield strategies.

To support such planning, we have adapted Madeline Hunter's *Master Teaching* lesson plan model to incorporate these strategies. Our *Master Learners* schema involves five steps—set the *goal*, *access* prior knowledge, introduce *new* information, *apply* new information, and review the *goal* (known as GANAG for short). It also includes ways a teacher can deliver lessons to actively engage all students by teaching

G — SET THE GOAL
HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition | Setting objectives and providing feedback
1–2 MINUTES

TEACHER ROLE
Make the declarative or procedural lesson goal clear and visible and teach a strategy so students know how to interact with it

STUDENT ROLE
Write and/or say the lesson goal and rate self on current degree of knowledge or skill

Opportunity for Feedback: Self-Assessment

A — ACCESS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE
HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES
Nonlinguistic representations | Cooperative learning | Questions, cues, and advanced organizers
2–3 MINUTES

TEACHER ROLE
Provide students with a prompt that anticipates the lesson content or cues the new information to be learned

STUDENT ROLE
Connect to the visual prompt provided by the teacher, think about it in relation to current knowledge, and talk with partners to clarify thinking

Opportunity for Feedback: Peer Assessment

N — INTRODUCE NEW INFORMATION
HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES
Nonlinguistic representations | Cooperative learning | Questions, cues, and advanced organizers | Summarizing and note taking
10–20 MINUTES

TEACHER ROLE
- Introduce new information to students and model how to take notes to gather and organize declarative knowledge or practice procedural knowledge
- Pause frequently throughout the delivery of content so students clarify their thinking by generating or answering questions, or using other strategies

STUDENT ROLE
- Take notes to gather new information as guided by the teacher
- Seek clarification from peers and/or the teacher during pauses by generating questions
- Edit notes with the new information gained and/or solve a problem after an example

Opportunity for Feedback: Peer and Expert Assessment

A — APPLY NEW INFORMATION
HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES
Identifying similarities and differences | Generating and testing hypotheses | Questions, cues, and advanced organizers | Homework and practice
10–20 MINUTES

TEACHER ROLE
Explain the learning task and circulate among students as they independently apply the new information to check understanding and provide feedback

STUDENT ROLE
Individually apply what is being learned, use thinking skills for declarative knowledge or practice procedural knowledge, and seek feedback from peers and the teacher

Opportunity for Feedback: Self-, Peer, and Expert Assessment

G — REVIEW THE GOAL
HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES
Reinforcing effort and providing recognition | Setting objectives and providing feedback
3–5 MINUTES

TEACHER ROLE
Ask students to rate their understanding of the lesson goal at the end of the class session

STUDENT ROLE
Rate own understanding in relationship to the lesson goal and effort exerted in the class session

Opportunity for Feedback: Self-Assessment

Source: Pollock, J. E., Hensley, S., & Tolone, L. (2019). *High-Quality Lesson Planning* (QRG). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

them to use the strategies (Pollock, 2007; Pollock & Tolone, 2020). Figure 1 shows how to use GANAG. Each step in GANAG states the teacher action and describes how to actively engage all students during the lesson.

For example, one math teacher who worked with us used to write his learning objective on the board, assuming students would read it. Now he teaches students to write down the objective and pre-assess their knowledge and their effort. Students assess themselves again at the end of class to gauge their learning. Students noticed that when they increased effort, they learned the math better. In only a few days, students began to ask for the objective and often would question its connection to previous goals. Their engagement, the teacher says, has allowed the objective to serve as the students' learning intention, rather than it being purely teacher driven.

Similarly, another teacher we worked with, Trish Harry, used to review the previous day's lesson at the start of each class. Now she deliberately plans for students to access prior knowledge, step 2 in GANAG. Trish shows a visual and provides a question for students to discuss in pairs (cooperative learning). She might show a political cartoon or an image of an artifact (nonlinguistic) to cue the new information tied to the goal. Trish notes that her lesson reviews in the past only engaged five or six students, whereas using an image and pair/share in this step piques every student's attention every time.

In the past, chemistry teacher Amber Greer would spend her planning time creating slides for her class; now, using GANAG, she designs her slides to teach students how to take notes during the *Introduce New Information* phase (note taking). She adds "pause" slides between her content slides and teaches students to use interactive notebooks, so they have time to think about the content. They might add information to a diagram (nonlinguistic), talk with a tablemate briefly about an issue (cooperative learning), or generate questions to connect more deeply to the content (questions). The frequent pauses re-engage students during this phase, increasing the likelihood that they will retain the information.

Teachers who intentionally plan for student engagement in these ways have reported that their students' long-term retention of declarative knowledge noticeably increased. Then they could tackle the next step: teaching critical and creative thinking skills.

②
Teach Thinking Skills

Returning to how the brain functions, Goldberg writes that humans, uniquely, can "create models of something that does not yet exist but that one wants to bring into existence" (p. 23). To adapt one of the examples Goldberg provides (2009), it makes sense that you do not need to use your frontal lobes to remember what a person looks like or to make a mental image of a bird, but you do have to use your pre-frontal cortex to think of how to design a way for humans to fly. When we think, we generate new ideas. We innovate.

In their daily lives, students are exposed to volumes of stimulation and information that makes them think about which song to purchase online, how to analyze their schedules to find time to attend a party, or how to compare various restaurant options. Given that students are already thinking naturally to process the world around them, why would we argue that teachers should explicitly teach thinking skills in school? Because many of students' assignments ask them to *remember* information, but not to compare, analyze, or make associations about the topics in the same way they do in their daily lives. To teach innovation, teachers can explicitly teach thinking skills by encouraging students to think about the declarative knowledge within the lesson's goal.

To teach thinking explicitly, our GANAG framework suggests using some of the 12 skills listed in *The i5 Approach*: *Lesson Planning that Teaches Thinking Skills and Fosters Innovation* (Pollock & Hensley, 2018), such as, classifying, using analogies, analyzing perspectives, investigating, and finding logical fallacies. Each of the thinking skills includes a series of steps. Here's one example:

> *Systems Analysis: Know how the parts of a system impact the whole.*
>
> 1. Identify an object, event, or thing as a system.
>
> 2. Describe its parts and how they function.
>
> 3. Change a part or function and explain how that affects the whole.
>
> 4. Change other part(s) and explain the results.
>
> 5. Summarize and use the findings to generate deeper understandings or an improvement to the system. (Pollock & Hensley, 2018)

Many of students' assignments ask them to remember information, but not to compare, analyze, or make associations about the topics in the same way they do in their daily lives.

Adapting this approach, a history teacher like Tyler Douglas might plan a lesson about the settlement of the West in the United States. After the lecture and discussion, he could teach students to apply the newly acquired declarative knowledge by using systems analysis. Tyler could then frame the time period as a system and suggest that certain changes, such as revising the Homestead Act or relocating the Transcontinental Railroad, would result in different settlement patterns. This type of thinking task allows students to deepen their understanding of history while generating new insights about historical concepts.

Of course, teachers from all disciplines can teach thinking skills. A math teacher can use classifying as a method for 1st graders to learn the differences among shapes; a middle school science teacher can teach students to use analogy to describe the endocrine system like a vending machine; and physical education students may investigate ways that people recover from different types of exercise and sports injuries. To think deeply, students need to learn to use thinking skills, and they need a lot of information about the topics. That leads us to the third aspect of lesson planning for innovation: using technology to maximize access to information.

3

Use Technology to Maximize Access to Information

We have explained why and how to teach students to retain declarative information and use thinking skills, yet the question remains: Where can students access enough information that can lead to deep thinking about any given topic in a school's curriculum? We expect that most educators will have a resounding answer—the Internet.

In the world outside of the classroom, we see, hear, smell, touch, and taste as ways to gather information. Traditionally in school, students have only been able to see and hear about a topic from a teacher. Textbooks and print materials can only provide so much information and generally not enough to create the environment that engenders deep thinking. When a teacher plans lessons that incorporate technology, however, students have access to almost infinite multisensory stimuli.

The concept of the i5 Approach mentioned above emerged from blending the current expectation that students use technology in school with the neurological finding that people need to know a lot to think productively. By searching online, students can literally find something to "think about," to generate better original ideas. Searching online provides more than just basic textbook information. It can also provide video, pictures, diagrams, opportunities to modify models, and ways to seek and receive feedback.

The *i5 Approach* calls for teachers to show students how to use their devices during the instruction or new information part of a lesson, as opposed to using them only for the guided practice or independent practice. When teachers plan lessons for teaching students to use critical and creative thinking skills, they should consider how to maximize access to information. When planning lessons, teachers can ask themselves the "i5 questions" about using technology:

1. How would more *information* help students see the details and breadth of this topic?

2. How would *images* or nonlinguistic representations add meaning or context to the topic?

3. How would *interacting* with programs or other people provide clarifying and corrective feedback?

4. How would *inquiry*—a thinking skill—

enrich the depth of a topic?

5. What *innovative* ideas could students produce?

One educator we worked with, Frank Korb, teaches about chiaroscuro art. While a textbook may provide a few paragraphs and images to explain the concept, Frank asks his students to search for information about the technique online, where they could view multiple sites—from museums to private collections—with related information and images. Students use digital devices to gain access to the volume of information and images that enrich interaction with peers and the teacher about the lesson's content. To process this inundation of knowledge, Frank's students learn to use inquiry, setting the stage for innovation. They use the knowledge they gained to push further in their thinking by creating their own art pieces or producing critiques to share with the class.

In an advanced Spanish course, to take another example, students might read a picaresque novel. They could learn to search online for information about the genre, including examining images from books, cinema, and other forms of art. Students may listen to podcasts or lectures by authors and critics; for inquiry, they might engage in problem solving about whether certain texts should be considered part of the genre.

When technology coach George Santos works with elementary teachers, he reminds them that students need to learn how to search for information. In addition to training teachers how to use programs, he employs the i5 Approach to help them ensure that the content of lessons will result in students becoming both technologically savvy

and much better at gathering the right information, so they can create original ideas.

Teachers can plan for students to use digital platforms to gather large amounts of content about the lesson's topic; this enhances the students' ability to sort, anticipate, plan, predict, and evaluate. They will have plenty of declarative knowledge to "think about," opening doors to innovating.

Turning Students into Innovators

How can educators ensure that innovative teaching results in students being innovators? Students come to class actively seeking information and feedback. They need lessons planned and delivered in a slightly different way than in the past. When students have opportunities to regularly learn

curricular content with effective strategies to enhance long-term retention, they become more engaged. By applying thinking skills as a springboard for creating, they naturally seek more information. Finally, they need to readily have access to large amounts of information in multisensory formats to make connections between existing knowledge and new possibilities.

Teachers, whether teaching in-person or remote, can have confidence that by making the few changes to lesson planning and delivery described here, their innovative lessons will also turn students into the innovators. **EL**

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Jane E. Pollock, author of many ASCD books, works with teachers to improve learning. **Laura J. Tolone** has served students in the United States and abroad as a teacher, librarian, administrative leader, and consultant. **Gary S. Nunnally** works with schools to develop curriculum, research-based instruction, and standards-based assessments.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Do you think your students got more innovative while learning during the pandemic? Why or why not?

—————————————

What's one small way you might rewrite a lesson plan to encourage innovative thinking in students?

—————————————

How can teachers use technology in their teaching to broaden student thinking and learning, but not overwhelm them?

For School Leaders, Reviewing Isolated Lessons Isn't Enough

Evaluators need to consider lessons in the context of the overall curriculum unit, like the parts of a full-course meal.
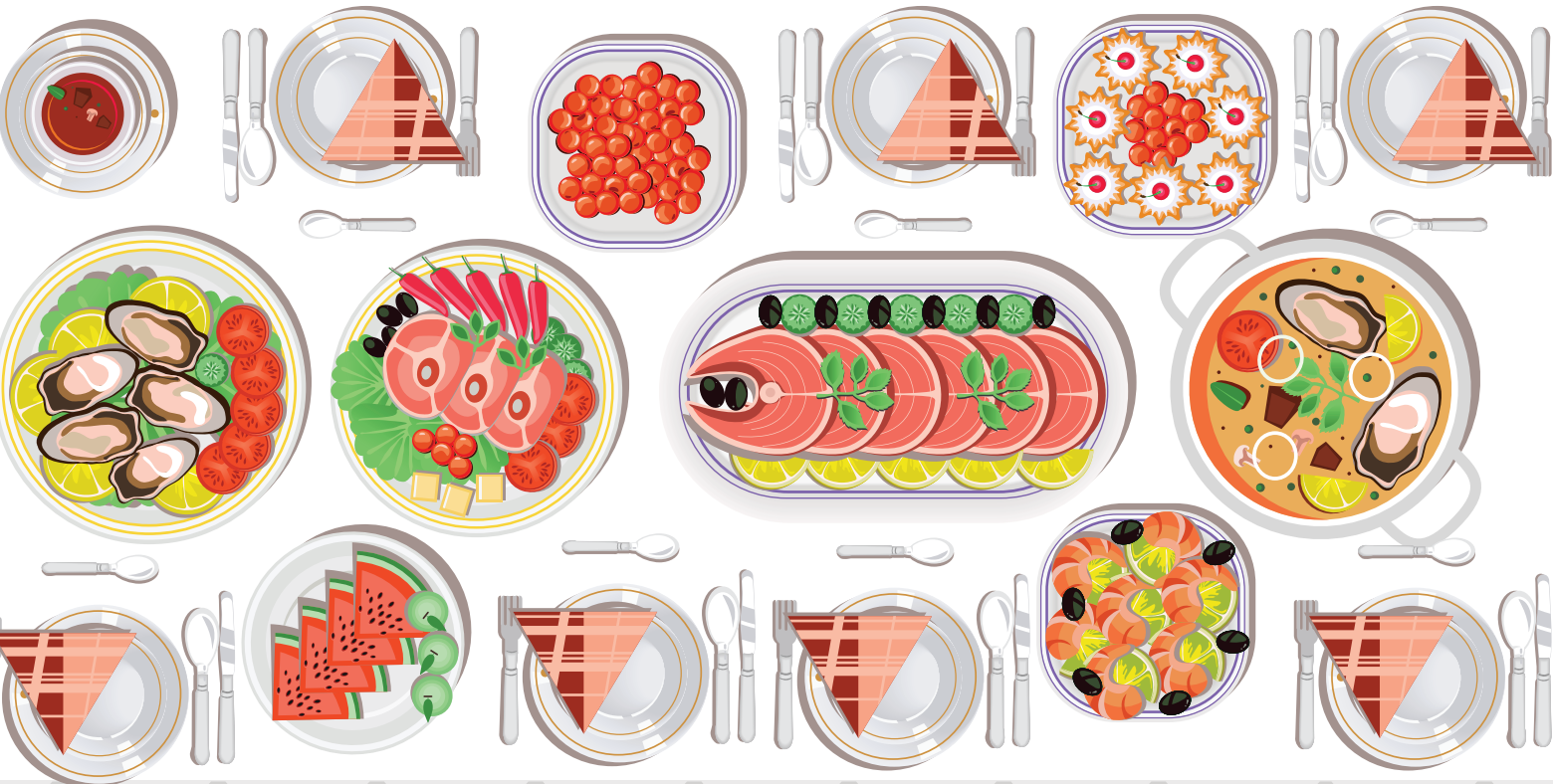
Jay McTighe

I n schools, a lesson functions as an individual building block to support the learning of new material. Experts have identified key elements in an effective lesson,[1] and education leaders—including school-based administrators, instructional coaches, department and grade-level chairs—usually look for these elements when reviewing lesson plans and observing lessons being implemented in classrooms. While there is certainly value in examining individual lessons, I offer a cautionary note: Don't miss the forest for the

trees. Specifically, I contend that school and district leaders need to consider lessons in the context of the overall curriculum unit those lessons are part of.

In developing Understanding by Design (UbD), our well-known curriculum planning framework, Grant Wiggins and I chose the unit as a focus for instructional design because the key elements of UbD—"big ideas," enduring understandings, essential questions, and performance assessment tasks—are too complex and multifaceted to be satisfactorily addressed within a single lesson.[2] For instance, essential questions are intended be explored over time, not fully "answered" by the end of one lesson. Similarly, authentic performance tasks and projects (as in project-based learning) cannot be fully accomplished within a 45- or 52-minute lesson period.

How Is a Unit Like a Full-Course Dinner?

Consider an analogy to dining: Think of a curriculum unit as a full-course meal, with individual lessons representing the various parts of the meal–aperitif, appetizer, entrée, side dishes, bread, dessert, and digestif. While a school leader can review discrete lesson plans (just as a diner can take a few bites of an appetizer), it's important to recognize that a single lesson is a necessary but not sufficient part of an overall, in-depth learning experience (just as an appetizer is a key but insufficient element of an entire meal).

Reviewing lesson plans or viewing lessons in the context of a larger unit underscores another key point: Lessons vary across the scope of a unit. Like an appetizer served at the beginning of a meal, initial lessons will have certain features that differ from later ones, and in reviewing all the lessons in a unit plan, a leader should expect to see different kinds of lessons containing different elements at the beginning, middle, and end of the unit. For example, we would expect the opening lesson(s) of a unit to begin with some "hook" to engage and focus learners on the new material; provide an advance organizer of the new content to be learned; present essential questions for the unit that focus on its "big

While there is value in examining individual lessons, don't miss the forest for the trees.

ideas;" introduce key academic vocabulary (such as through a word wall); forecast summative assessments so that students know how their learning will be gauged; and present (or codevelop with students) the "success criteria" by which their learning will be evaluated. Beginning lessons should also include a pre-assessment to check on students' prior knowledge and skill levels, as well as check for potential misconceptions prior to introducing a new topic or skill.

By contrast, the lessons that comprise the bulk of the unit (the meal's entrée) should systematically build targeted knowledge and skills over time. Like the carefully selected spices in a main course, the particular instructional technique(s) used in a given lesson should align closely with the targeted learning outcomes. For example, there are times for

General "Look-fors" in Unit Plans

When reviewing unit plans, leaders should consider to what extent:

■ The unit and the associated lessons are focused on priority standards, "big ideas," and transferrable skills.

■ Students are helped to understand a unit's overall goals, how they will be assessed, and the "success criteria" by which their learning will be judged.

■ The targeted instruction in lessons is well aligned to these unit goals.

■ Lessons include opportunities for students to actively make meaning of, and apply, the content and skills of the unit (such as through Socratic questioning, thinking frames, etc.).

■ Opportunities for students to receive specific, timely feedback, and opportunities to use it, are built-in.

■ The unit's summative assessments collect appropriate evidence for the targeted learning goals.

> **A leader should be able to see, in reviewing the progression of lessons in a unit, that students are moving from guided practice to increasingly independent applications.**

direct instruction and modeling by the teacher and times when Socratic questioning or cooperative learning will be most appropriate for engaging students in active meaning making.

Main-meal lessons should also include formative assessments whose results give teachers insight about whether some reteaching or differentiated instruction may be needed. Information from ongoing formative assessments also enables teachers to provide timely and helpful feedback to students, along with opportunities for learners to use that feedback (such as focused practice, revision of drafts, revisiting key concepts).

Another reason for viewing a series of lessons, rather than only one, is to enable leaders to observe whether the lesson sequence shows a "gradual release of responsibility" over time. A leader should be able to see that students are moving from guided practice to increasingly independent applications as they develop their skills.

Toward the latter part of the unit, we would expect to see lessons designed to prepare learners for culminating assessments. Just as athletic coaches employ scrimmages and theater directors use dress rehearsals to prepare for the opening-night performance, so should teachers include experiences in final lessons that prepare students for summative assessments. These could include "practice" tests, mini tasks, or tasks guided by the teacher.

The Unique Flavors of Unit Endings

And just as a dessert differs in size and taste from the main meal, the concluding lesson in a unit will likely include unique elements, such as opportunities for students to self-assess and reflect upon their experience. Teachers might pose questions like:

■ What do you now really understand about [key concept(s) or process]?

■ What are you most proud of in what you [learned, accomplished, or produced]?

■ What would you do differently next time?

■ How does what you've learned connect to other learnings?

A final lesson might also include a celebration of worthy achievements and preview of the next unit.

Enjoy Your Meal

In sum, just as I encourage teachers to frame out an entire unit before focusing on developing the discrete lessons, I recommend that leaders look at a teacher's overall unit plan, to see where individual lessons fit in, *before* reviewing any specific lesson plan or observing a lesson being taught. In the spirit of "backward design," leaders need to clearly have the end in mind—the overall goals of a unit—before they analyze and evaluate individual lessons—the *means* to those ends.

So, think of your role in reviewing lesson plans like being a restaurant reviewer. You need to sample the entire meal (a full unit) in order to better understand and appreciate the qualities of a single course (lesson). Bon appétit! **EL**

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Jay McTighe (jay@mctighe-associates.com) is an education writer and consultant, and coauthor with Grant Wiggins of *The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units* (ASCD, 2011) and other books in the UbD series.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

For principals: Do you generally review teachers' lesson plans in the context of the overall unit the lesson is part of? How might it change your review of a lesson if you did so?

————————

Does it resonate with you the way McTighe describes how lessons in the early, middle, and later part of a unit differ? What would need to change in your school or district for the lesson-planning process to include more emphasis on the different parts and functions of a unit?

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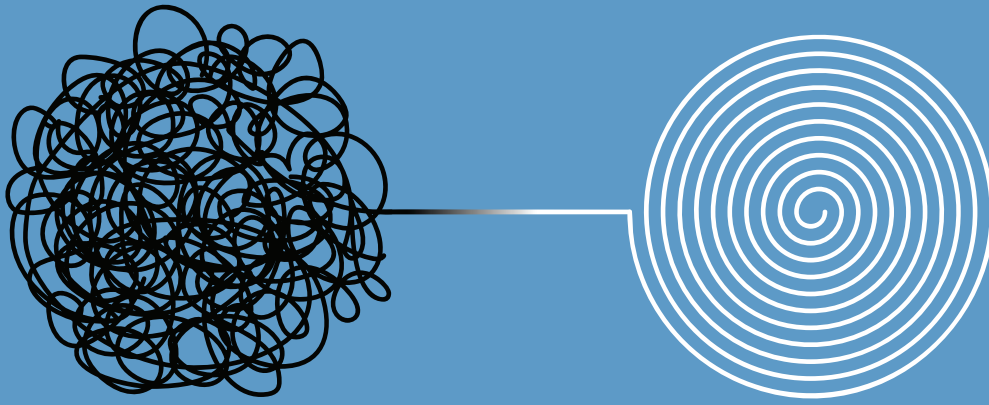*Total Professional Learning Time: 12 Weeks, 15 hours*

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Developing Well-Designed Standards-Based Units

A five-step framework takes the guesswork out of instructional planning.

Tim Westerberg

Despite the best of intentions on the part of overworked and undertrained classroom teachers, instructional planning can too often be described as idiosyncratic, haphazard, and lacking any logically or pedagogically defensible structure. What passes for planning often involves some version of: (1) thinking about the next day's lesson based on what is suggested by the next section in the textbook, under the unquestioned belief that if what is in the textbook is "covered," important state standards will be addressed; (2) creating formative assessment tasks on the spot each day; and (3) coming up with a summative assessment the night before it is to be administered.

What is missing from this approach is a unifying planning framework that ensures alignment between *stated* curriculum, *taught* curriculum, and *assessed* curriculum. A sound structure that guides teams of teachers in developing tightly aligned units of instruction, before the first lesson of the unit is taught, has the potential to significantly improve student performance

(Westerberg, 2016). A standards-based learning planning framework, encompassing the five steps below and field-tested in my work with schools across the country, provides such a structure.

STEP ❶

Identify Priority Standards for Grade-Level Subjects and Courses

Simply put, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to design units of instruction that promote deep learning around *every* listed academic content standard. There just isn't enough time. Effective unit planning begins with identifying a limited number of overarching or enduring standards and moving from what Douglas Reeves calls "fragmentation to focus" (Reeves, 2021). Criteria for identifying priority standards are well-established in the professional literature (see Marzano, 2006; Heflebower, Hoegh, & Warrick, 2014).

STEP ❷

Identify Existing Units of Instruction that Address One (or More) Priority Standard(s)

Although there are exceptions, it is my experience that teachers traditionally organize instruction by topical units; for example, you might have "Solids, Liquids, and Gases" in a 2nd grade science class or "Reconstruction" in a high school U.S. history course. These units may range from several days to several weeks in length and are a useful way to "chunk" learning.

It is now expected in every state that instructional units be based on identified subject and grade-level or course standards. It is not always necessary, however, to develop new units from scratch. To honor teachers' prior work, teams can examine existing units of instruction to see where priority standards are already addressed or to pinpoint units which can be redesigned to include them.

STEP ❸

Create a Proficiency Scale for Each Standard in Each Unit

Essential to effective unit planning, assessment, and instruction—whether for in-person or virtual learning—is identifying, clearly and specifically,

what students must show the teacher they know and can do in order to meet a particular level of proficiency for a given standard. Marzano (2006) recommends what is in effect a five-point scale (0–4) with proficiency levels of *below basic*, *basic*, *proficient*, and *advanced*. An example of a proficiency scale can be found in Marzano and Heflebower's 2011 *Educational Leadership* article "Grades That Show What Students Know."

The success criteria listed next to each proficiency level take the guesswork out of what is expected for students and help guard against implicit bias on the part of teachers. For instance, for the topic "Animal and Plant Survival" noted in Figure 2 of the article just mentioned, students must, among other things, (1) "recall specific terminology related to the topic, such as plant, animal, and survival" to be certified at the *basic* level, (2) "describe and give examples of what plants and animals need to survive" to be certified as *proficient*, and (3) "compare and contrast the different ways plants and animals breathe and find nourishment" to be considered *advanced*. Success criteria identify the work for students (and parents) and direct the development of assessment tasks and instructional strategies by teachers (see steps 4 and 5).

STEP ❹

Design Assessment Tasks Tied to Each Unit's Proficiency Scale(s)

Perhaps the strongest feature of this unit planning framework, in addition to that of providing clear expectations for student performance, is the tight alignment the structure demands between the *stated* curriculum (as outlined in unit priority standards and proficiency scales), the *taught* curriculum (instructional tasks, assignments, and resources), and the *assessed* curriculum (summative and formative assessment tasks).

The standards-based learning planning framework does not limit the types of summative and formative assessment tasks that teachers can design—quizzes, tests, performances, projects, labs, structured observations, and oral examinations can all be valid and reliable assessment strategies.

What the planning structure does do is provide focus by tying each assessment task to one or more of the success criteria in the unit's proficiency scale(s). Particularly with regard to summative assessment, there should be no assessment task that cannot be linked directly to one or more unit success criterion, and there should be no unit success criterion for which there isn't at least one (preferably more) assessment task. In other words, valid and reliable assessment tasks should be incorporated for every unit success criterion, nothing more and nothing less.

Summative assessment tasks should be developed first, as they will then guide the development of appropriate formative tasks. Formative assessments, like summative assessments, are planned in advance of teaching the unit and are tied to key junctures in the learning progression for the targeted topic or standard—points at which students must show some level of mastery of key content and skills in order to be successful at the next stage in the progression. Checks for understanding, employed on an almost daily basis and not necessarily developed prior to the start of a unit, augment less frequent planned formative assessments.

STEP ⑤
Identify "High-Probability" Instructional Tasks and Assignments Tied to Each Unit's Proficiency Scale(s)
The last step in the unit planning process is to identify how the unit will be taught—what instructional strategies, assignments, and resources will be deployed to best enable all students to reach the unit priority standards as defined in the

REFLECT & DISCUSS

When planning units, how do you determine which standards to cover? How might you identify only those that are the most "overarching or enduring"?

What could you do to ensure that every assignment or task is tied to one or more unit success criterion?

What would need to change in your school or department for teachers to undertake standards-based unit planning as outlined in this article?

corresponding unit proficiency scales.

As is the case with assessment tasks, in-class and out-of-class strategies and assignments and the resources that support them must be tied directly to the success criteria listed in the unit proficiency scale(s). An instructional strategy or assignment that cannot be clearly tied to one or more unit success criterion, even if it is the teacher's favorite activity (six weeks of building Conestoga wagons in 5th grade, unrelated to any grade-level standard, is an example with which I am painfully familiar from my time as a principal), is time *not* well spent.

On the other hand, for the topic "Animal and Plant Survival," having students grow plants under different conditions (soil/no soil, water/no water, light/dark conditions, etc.) seems directly tied to the success criteria "describe and give examples of what plants and animals need to survive."

It is patently unfair to hold students accountable for something for which the teacher has provided no viable means of instruction. Every success criterion at every proficiency level for every unit proficiency scale needs corresponding planned instructional strategies. Alignment, alignment, alignment!

Beyond Haphazard Planning
Alternatives to idiosyncratic, haphazard, and unfocused instructional planning *do* exist. A standards-based learning unit planning process, briefly outlined here, is one such alternative with a research base to support it. Why not give teachers support by introducing structure to the lesson-planning process? Why not provide students with a transparent system of aligned curriculum, assessment, and instruction? Why not plan forward? ⬛

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Tim Westerberg is a former high school principal now serving as an education consultant. He is the author of *Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading: What to Stop, What to Start, and Why It Matters* (ASCD, 2016).

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Lesson Planning with UNIVERSAL DESIGN for Learning

Lee Ann Jung

Intentionally using UDL principles upfront means making fewer adaptations later— and reaching more students.

Ms. Talbert felt great about the lessons she had planned for her high school seniors using Universal Design for Learning, a framework for differentiating learning experiences. Her learning intentions were for students to evaluate sources of evidence and use evidence they gathered to support claims. The lessons built from activities like combing through social media and news sources to find claims that weren't adequately supported to making their own claims supported by evidence. Ms. Talbert included issues and topics that were on students' minds. She clarified

vocabulary and used multimedia, print, and audio as ways to access the content.

Later in the year, her students explored and analyzed the effects of baseless claims made online through fast-spreading social media. Finally, the class moved into discussions and debates. The class discussion became close to tense at times when students had conflicting opinions, all supported by evidence they deemed credible. But with Ms. Talbert's feedback and guidance, the groups used the class norms of collaboration to work through the dialogue in a productive manner. She beamed with pride as she watched the groups navigate difficult topics, strong opinions, and conflicting evidence.

Not everyone spoke in class or led discussions—but Ms. Talbert knew some students showed their best work by writing, others by speaking, and others through producing a creative product. She provided all these options for students to show their learning over time and was open to students' additional ideas of how that learning could be shown.

Why We Need Universal Design for Learning

Like Ms. Talbert's, every classroom is filled with individuals who vary wildly—and interestingly—in who they are as people. Their many experiences and genetics make them who they are—each one unique and wonderful. Some are strong with math, others are talented artists; some light up when it's time for science, and others love nothing more than getting lost in a fictional work. Some students speak multiple languages, but struggle in the language of instruction that is new to them.

For every student who loves a particular subject, there is another who is afraid of it, and another who finds it uninteresting.

Students not only vary in their skill level and preferences for academic content, but also in their social-emotional skills, development, and learning. This diversity in our classroom can pose instructional challenges, but it's also an asset! It presents the opportunity for students to learn from and with one another, gain an understanding of the interdependence within society, and

celebrate one another's unique qualities. Diversity is in no way a limitation as long as we keep it top of mind when designing instruction and assessment.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), originally designed by the organization CAST, is a framework that guides proactive design of classroom instruction and learning opportunities to make them effective for a broad range of learners.[1] UDL offers guidelines on how we can make our

> **Providing students with options for how to express their learning gives each student the chance to show their best work.**

instruction and classroom environments welcoming, responsive, supportive, and flexible, so that the fewest students possible require additional support or adaptations.

The developers of the framework organized UDL strategies into three categories: (1) multiple means of engagement—how we engage and sustain students' interest and persistence; (2) multiple means of representation—how we ensure our instruction is accessible and improves students' understanding; and (3) multiple means of action and expression—how we support students to show their learning in multiple ways. Such strategies, individually, are neither new nor revolutionary. But UDL, informed by these three principles and connected to neurological and educational research, offers an actionable framework that educators can use to increase the accessibility and power of every lesson we design.

Planning for Multiple Means of Engagement

Every teacher can relate to occasional difficulty in gaining students' interest. What if, when a student is having trouble engaging
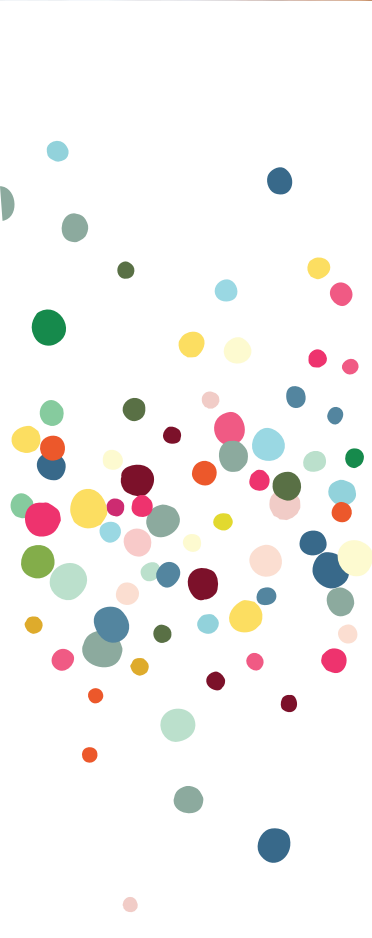
in the classroom, instead of attributing the problem to the student, we reframed it as *our* problem with engagement, asking ourselves what the students' behavior might say about our teaching?

If we presume variability in students' interest and plan our engagement strategies with the *least* engaged student in mind, we'll probably engage all the students in the class. Figure 1 shows some smart strategies for universal engagement.

Planning for Multiple Means of Representation

Fifteen years ago, you may have had a phone, a camera, a calendar, a video recorder, a device for listening to music, and a computer for accessing the Internet. For traveling, you may

have used a GPS or map and books for translating languages. Now, all these needs are met with one device. Because we have a customizable device with many options and functions, fewer people need specialized equipment. And while some still may prefer a physical calendar, say, we'd be hard pressed to find many people who own and use all those items.

Think of multiple means of representation—how we make our instruction accessible to all students—as a smartphone with many features and apps. Without a base of multiple means of representation planned into each lesson, teachers become exhausted trying to continually figure out how to differentiate content and deliver support to meet individual needs and maximize

strengths. By investing effort in multiple means of representation during lesson *planning*, we minimize special adaptations, because we've designed up front for many types of variability. Figure 2 shows some strategies for doing so.

Giving options for multiple ways you present information to students is not the same as segmenting students using the long-debunked notion of different learning styles. It simply means that, in instruction, you always present content in various ways that resonate with students' different strengths and preferences for processing information—based on what you know of each learner and what you've seen in their learning experiences.

FIGURE 1. Strategies for Engagement

1. Start by connecting with students using positive interaction.
- Use warm facial expressions and eye contact.
- Individually greet and acknowledge students with warmth.
- Show students empathy and support.

2. Demonstrate clarity of intentions and criteria for success.
- Describe purpose for upcoming learning, in writing and orally.
- Clarify vocabulary by highlighting words and lead groups to discuss these words' meaning.
- List, describe, and provide examples of success criteria for the learning.

3. Connect the purpose of the lesson to something of current relevance and value to students.
- Tell a story your students can relate to.
- Relate the lesson to a current event or pop culture for students' age group.
- Dialogue about the purpose of the lesson (beyond posting or reading the purpose).

4. Provide students choices—from simple to significant—for their learning.
Have students
- choose roles within small groups.
- choose learning activities or assignments from a menu.
- select the topic for their reading, research, or writing.
- codesign a lesson.

5. Make the learning space safe for taking risks and making mistakes.
- Let students choose where they sit and whether to work in a group or alone.
- Avoid public displays that compare performance or behaviors.
- Use small groups, where taking risks may feel safer.
- Ensure "participation" includes options other than speaking in a large group.

6. Use novelty to gain students' interest.
- Use humor.
- Start with a thought provoking or controversial statement and dialogue.
- Use a short video that captures interest.

7. Design activities that involve active exploration.
- Include opportunities to investigate, reflect, make, create, or dialogue.
- Have students move about the room during learning.

8. Design for small group instruction.
- Use short, whole-group instruction followed by stations.
- Let small groups determine their own norms of collaboration and goals for learning.
- Have flexible groups so students work with a variety of learners, with choice in group membership.

9. Use strategies to balance participation.
- Use "no hands up" think time before inviting contributions from the whole group.
- Use a talking stick.
- Rotate assigned roles of "talker" and "questioners."

10. Offer strategies for students to cope with frustration, anxiety, and low confidence.
- Offer mindfulness exercises (or apps) to help students cope with difficult learning.
- Help students break learning into smaller chunks.
- Have students reflect on a time when the learning was difficult, listing strategies they used then and applying them to current learning.
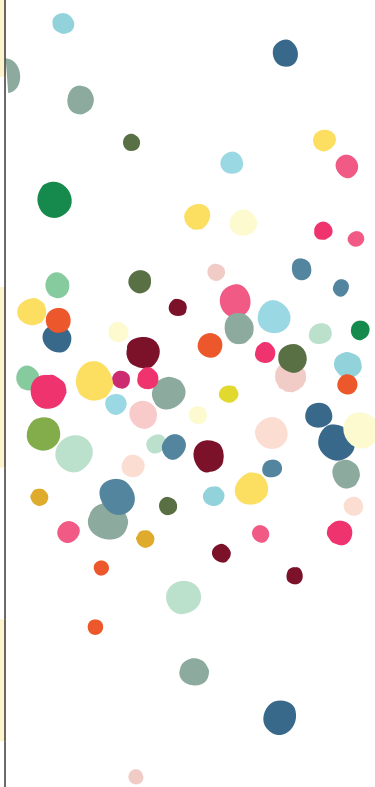
Planning for Multiple Means of Action and Expression

There are many ways to measure a student's learning of any given skill or understanding. But too often, we use a single, teacher-designed assessment for all students. The premise is that a standardized assessment makes for a fairer assessment. In fact, giving a single option for showing learning advantages those students with strengths in that option. Some of our students are talented presenters but lack confidence as "test takers." Some find tests easy but are afraid of speaking in front of the class. Some have strengths in writing or graphic design. For many, the idea of something being timed produces a great deal of stress and interferes with showing their learning.

This variability in performance under different conditions affects educators' ability to see what students understand and can do if they only use a single type of assessment. For example, if the only option we give is a timed test, then students who have test anxiety or need more time for processing can't show what they know. The validity of the test is compromised *because* we didn't offer another option. The assessment is less fair *because* it's standardized.

This isn't to suggest that we give students options for the *level* of proficiency they show, only for the *way* they show it. We can have the same expectations for skills and understanding shown through a class presentation, say, as through a paper, test, or other measure. (Note that even when we use

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FIGURE 2. Strategies for Multiple Means of Representation

1. Teach metacognitive strategies for learning within context of this concept or skill.
- Use analogies and metaphors.
- Teach notetaking and study strategies.
- Present a mnemonic orally and visually to help students remember new information—or help students create a mnemonic, such as a song.
- Connect the concept to something students already know, using several modalities.
- Chunk material into smaller pieces.
- Create study guides with strategies for learning embedded.

2. Use multiple means to represent content, concepts, and skills.
- Use slides with photographs and text, or a video, to enhance a mini-lecture.
- Give students the option to listen to text, read it, or both.
- Present content through a graphic organizer.
- Use illustrations to support comprehension.

3. Provide help with vocabulary, syntax, notations, and symbols.
- Use translations for English learners.
- Provide support for decoding text.
- Clarify the meanings of symbols and notations.
- Use scaffolds to support syntax and sentence structure.

4. Gradually release support to promote independence.
- Model and use examples and non-examples.
- Use guided practice and collaborative learning experiences.
- As assessments show students gaining capability with a skill, move to independent practice.

5. Create experiences for deliberate practice, spaced over time.
- Help students select the level of difficulty that's just beyond what they're confident they know/can do, but that can be achieved with practice and concentration.
- Provide learning experiences that allow and require students to persist with concentration across many days, with time between each experience—such as problems that include provocative questions, conflict, and contradictions.
- Let students identify and select conditions under which they concentrate and persist best.
- Minimize distractions during times of deliberate practice and concentration.

6. Give formative feedback.
- Provide clear, ungraded feedback on products of learning and the process of learning.
- Guide students to evaluate their own learning.
- Conference with individual students about a product or process; help them generate a plan for what to do next.
- Share feedback in ways that show confidence in the student's ability to learn.
- Connect feedback to specific learning goals.

7. Use formative assessment to change instruction.
Use formative assessment of students' work and learning to:
- inform the strategies you use in the remainder of the unit.
- determine whether students are ready for more independent practice and learning.
- make decisions about flexible grouping.
- make decisions about supplemental instruction for small groups.

> **What if, when a student is having trouble engaging in the classroom, instead of attributing the problem to the student, we reframed it as our problem?**

alternative measures, it's still important to document the need for extended time for students with disabilities, who will need this accommodation for state or national testing.)

Figure 3 shows many of the nearly countless ways we can have students demonstrate their understanding and skills. If the idea of giving students many different options for showing their learning feels overwhelming, teachers can start by identifying the typical assessment for an upcoming unit and selecting one alternative. Regardless of whether educators take this on full force or start small, the need for this practice is pressing.

Realizing Their Brilliance

Many teachers recognize that each of their students is (wondrously) different, in how they take in information, how they practice and engage with content to learn it, and in how they show their learning. UDL gives teachers a way to present information in many formats, as Ms. Talbert did in her unit, so instruction can hit as many students' preferred ways of learning as possible. And UDL strategies make the most of assessment, since the purpose of our day-to-day classroom assessment is to inform teaching and learning. Providing students with options for how to express their learning gives each student the chance to show their best work. The resulting assessment types lend much more valid information and give teachers more precise direction on how to maximize learning for each child.

Without providing multiple means of presenting concepts and information, we won't reach all students. And without providing

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FIGURE 3. Strategies for Multiple Means of Action and Expression

Ways Students Can Demonstrate Their Learning

- Videorecorded presentation
- Live presentation to the class—or to a teacher or external audience
- Infographic
- Multimedia presentation
- Individual conference with a teacher
- Written answers to given questions
- Lesson taught live to another person
- Physical model student constructs
- Illustration or other visual art product
- Diagram or graph
- Essay, story, or other written product
- Skit or play
- Revision or improvement of an existing product
- Solutions to given problems
- Newly created problems
- Service activity related to the content/skill
- Being interviewed on the content
- Verbal response to given questions, or responding with a gesture or image
- Musical performance

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options for expression, we may never fully realize the brilliance many of our students have—brilliance often disguised by a counterfeit definition of how success in school must look. **EL**

[1]CAST. (n.d.). About CAST.

Author's note: "Ms. Talbert" is a hypothetical teacher and situation. The strategies outlined here for engagement, representation, and expression are drawn from UDL resources, the professional research literature, strategies I've used, and my observations within classrooms. For additional strategies for applying UDL in lesson planning, visit http://udlguidelines.cast.org/.

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Lee Ann Jung is CEO of Lead Inclusion and a clinical professor at San Diego State University. She consults with schools internationally on inclusion, Universal Design for Learning, assessment and grading, and Response to Intervention. Follow her on Twitter @leeannjung.

Planning for *Fair* Group Work

Amir Rasooli and Susan M. Brookhart

Group work has *a lot* going for it. It incorporates the social-cognitive and social-emotional aspects of learning and can lead to memorable, engaging lessons and increased learning for students (Forsell, Forslund Frykedal, & Hammar Chiriac, 2020; Fung, Hung, & Lui, 2018). But group work can also fall flat—and cause student disengagement—if not carefully designed and assessed.

The original cooperative learning movement, energized in the 1970s, emphasized that group work must be designed to feature positive interdependence (each student's work depends on the others' work) and individual accountability (individual learning is measured and reported)—methods found to increase student achievement. Since then, group work has grown in popularity, under various names (*cooperative learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *group work*, to name a few). Teachers use group work to promote active and deep learning and foster students' collaborative skills (Tomcho & Foels, 2012).

Sometimes group work is still designed according to the original cooperative learning principles of positive interdependence and individual accountability, but not always. Often students are simply assigned a project or task to carry out in a small group, the final project is graded, and that same grade is assigned to each of the members of the group producing it. Students perceive this practice as unfair—which can make them reluctant to participate in group work (Forsell et al., 2020). Unfair group experiences put students in a difficult position, as students expressed in interviews Amir did with 27 Canadian high school students in 2020. The interviews were part of Amir's doctoral dissertation investigating students' experiences of fairness in classroom assessment (all student quotations here are taken from this unpublished qualitative study). One student expressed his feelings about group work this way: "I've definitely been in a lot of groups where people don't contribute, but I don't go to the teacher and try and tell them the problem because . . . you don't want to, you know, be a snitch. Like, we don't want to tell on our friends."

So How Do We Do Group Work *Right*?

To implement and assess group work fairly, teachers should focus on four elements: purpose of the group work,

group composition and student choice, physical environment and task design, and assessment and grading. Let's look at each element in turn.

1 Establish a Clear Purpose for Working in Groups

Teachers generally use group work for at least two purposes: to support students' progress toward learning goals and to develop collaborative learning skills. Each of those goals can be assessed at the group or individual level (Forsell et al., 2020), creating four possible purposes for implementing and assessing group work:

■ Individual learning: Did an individual student achieve a standard or learning goal?

■ Group learning: Did the group project meet standards for quality work?

■ Individual collaboration skills: Did an individual student work effectively as a member of the group?

■ Group collaboration skills: Did the students function well as a group?

Teachers' understandings of their intended purposes for a group work project and what specifically they will assess are often vague (Forsell et al., 2020). Sometimes, teachers just have a general sense that it's good for students to work together, without any consideration of how the students' learning will benefit from a particular group task. This may be part of the reason some teachers give group grades—and it's one reason students perceive group grades as unfair.

Report card grades are assigned to individual students and are intended to be measures of achievement against curricular standards. Therefore, group work that's going to count on individual students' report cards should answer the question of whether each individual student in the group achieved the target standard or learning goal (we'll say more on how to do this later).

Group work can also be designed specifically to teach collaboration skills. In this case, work can be assessed at the individual or group level, depending on the kind of skills entailed—but it shouldn't be graded in a way that counts on students' official records.

2 Use Heterogeneous Groups, But Offer Choice If Possible

Teachers give students choice during group work in two ways (Rasooli, Zandi, & DeLuca, 2018). Students can choose which group they will join or students can be assigned to a group and given choices about their role and work within that group.

At times, it's best for the teacher to create the groups; for one thing, this makes groups less homogeneous. To form heterogeneous groups based on ability levels, teachers usually select a mix of lower, middle, and higher-performing students (Williams, Cera Guy, & Shore, 2019). When groups are diverse in aspects other than academic ability—for example, in terms of students' backgrounds and experiences relating to the work at hand—groups will include a broader range of points of view.

Allowing students choice in selecting their group members, however, seems to enhance students' perception of fairness in group work. People perceive fairness when they are given choice and control over decisions that will impact their outcomes (Forsell et al., 2020). Students may also assume more ownership of the work when they've chosen their group.

For some group activities, then, teachers may want to give students choice about which group they will be in; for others, they may give students choice about which role they will play in the project or task. These decisions should be aligned with the purpose of the group work, and are made easier if students have many opportunities to do things in different groups

throughout the course. Giving students voice, control, and agency over group work procedures to the greatest extent possible will enhance most students' learning and perceptions of fairness. As one high school student said, "I think giving us the chance to pick people—you know what you're getting yourself into from the beginning. So if there really is a problem, you should speak up. If not, I think you kind of just have to deal with it. It's kind of like a life lesson."

In even the most carefully composed group, however, free-riding (when one member of the group does not contribute) can occur, and high-performing members might reduce their contributions to preserve the sense of fairness (Webb et al., 1998). Careful task design and role scaffolding can reduce free-riding and develop group members' collaborative learning skills. As with any skill, collaboration can be taught. Teachers can develop rules or criteria for fostering trust and respect among group members and communicate these rules to students upon the beginning of the group work. These rules can include: (a) everyone should be respected in the group; (b) everyone should recognize and appreciate diverse ways of thinking, working, and behaving as beneficial to the group learning; (c) no one should be left outside of the group; and (d) everyone should contribute to the group work as much as they would like others to contribute. This relational approach to establishing group dynamics has been found to be a key strategy for an effective group work process (Fung et al., 2018).

3 Use Flexible Seating and Design Tasks So Everyone Contributes

Learning is a social phenomenon and takes place in a physical and social environment. Arrange seating for groups flexibly so that all group members can effectively interact. For example, arrange seats in a shape such as a circle to give all students access to the work and similar physical representation. Since regularity brings focus to complex tasks such as group work, groups may benefit from knowing ahead of time which area of the room they will work in.

Tasks, assignments, or projects should also be designed to encourage interactions among group members. For example, a project may have divisible segments so that group members can distribute tasks and all contribute to the workload, then combine their individual work

What a Well-Designed Group Project Looks Like

Here's an example of a successful, fair group project a teacher designed, keeping in mind four principles: (1) establish a clear purpose for group work; (2) use heterogeneous groups and give students choice when possible; (3) use functional, flexible seating and well-designed materials; (4) grade individual learning and assess collaborative skills separately.

Classroom groups have been given a project to investigate the impact of World War I on the social, cultural, and economic conditions of a region in North America. Students were given the chance to select their group members, with each group having four students. The teacher shares with students the rubric she will use for grading the project (principle 1). Groups must find multiple sources, including multimedia resources, and must present the product of their collective work on a poster. Students may choose which region they will investigate and may divide up the research work as they choose (principle 2). When they have collected their sources, they meet as a group to integrate their findings (principle 3).

Each group exhibits their poster in a classroom gallery walk. The teacher and students use peer assessment to provide feedback about each group's poster and achievement of learning outcomes, and self-assessment for feedback about their group process (principle 4). After the gallery walk, the teacher asks students to write individual essays about the impact of World War I on the social, cultural, and economic conditions of a region of their choice in North America. The teacher provides feedback on each student's essay and assigns individual grades based on the rubric (principle 4).

together. Or a project may be divided into several steps (like planning, outlining, researching, and writing). Students can do the steps collaboratively and receive formative feedback from their teacher about both the learning content and the group process after each step (Brookhart, 2013).

Alternatively, a single task may be scaffolded with role divisions to encourage interactions and positive interdependence. A classic format for this is reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), which aims to help all students comprehend an assigned text and develop

When students are asked about fairness, group work—especially group grades—often top their list of unfair practices.

skills in independent reading. After reading the text, students take turns fulfilling four roles: questioner, summarizer, clarifier, and predictor. The teacher first models these functions until the students are able to become the "teachers" (hence the name "reciprocal teaching") and perform the functions themselves. In addition to focusing students on the strategies good readers use, the four roles ensure that everyone in the group has something specific to do that contributes to the group understanding. Performance in these roles isn't graded; student understanding should be assessed individually after the reciprocal teaching.

Group tasks, assignments, or projects should also have adequate complexity for group work to be effective. Tasks that aren't sufficiently complex lead to more free-riding. Research also shows that groups of three to four students and tasks of shorter duration result in better learning outcomes than larger groups or longer tasks (Tomcho & Foels, 2012).

4 Grade *Individual* Learning and Assess Collaboration Separately

For grading purposes, assess individuals—don't give "group grades" (Brookhart, 2013). Teachers generally assess learning goals during group work with either group assessment, a combination of group and individual assessments, or individual assessment. Research shows individual assessment is clearly best, and fairest, for the purpose of individual grade reporting.

While group grading may be the easiest approach, it encourages free-riding and provokes unfair experiences for students. As one high schooler Amir interviewed for his dissertation project said, "Ninety percent of the time, group work is unfair, unless the teacher is really on the ball and knows what's going on. I find that either 25 or 50 percent of the group does all the work, and the other [group members] are just along for the ride." When group grades are given to groups with mixed ability levels, high-ability students often receive lower grades than they usually get individually; the reverse is true for low-ability students (Forsell et al., 2020). Finally, group grading ignores the fact that report cards are issued to *individual* students, and therefore individual measures of achievement are needed.

Another method teachers report for grading group work is to assign grades based on two components: a group's product (such as a presentation) and individual grades derived by peer assessment or peer assessment combined with self-assessment (Dijkstra et al., 2016). But with this method, the group component has the same shortcomings described for group grading, and the individual component also poses challenges for fairness. Plus, research has challenged the validity, reliability, and fairness of peer assessment, indicating that peer assessment is only weakly correlated with teacher assessment (Forsell et al., 2020). With self-assessment, in addition, high-performing students often underrate themselves for their performance in group work, while low-ability students overrate themselves (Forsell et al.,

2020). Overall, a combination of group and individual assessments doesn't seem like a sound approach to grading group work.

Individual assessment, however, addresses the shortcomings of other approaches and makes for fairer assessment of learning objectives. Students work collaboratively on a task, but are assessed *individually* for their learning of the curriculum objectives (Brookhart, 2013, 2015). Generally, after group work, teachers provide students with individual tasks aligned with that work and its associated learning objectives to grade each student's achievement. Students tend to find this fairer. One told Amir, "Teachers usually assigned group grades, which was hard. But if you get individual grades while working in the group, you would think it is fair."

Teachers do value assessing social skills such as group members' cooperation, positive engagement, and communication (Dijkstra et al., 2016; Forsell et al., 2020). But these skills can be assessed separately from the academic grade, through teacher observation, peer- and self-report surveys, or rubrics.[1] Feedback on social and collaborative skills can be given at the individual and group level, so students can learn and improve in these areas. With this approach, the academic grade reflects curricular learning goals at the individual level and other assessments address individual and group collaborative skills.

Putting It All Together

Research indicates that group work can be an important part of both cognitive and social learning. However, such work has to be done carefully if it's to enhance learning and not alienate learners; when students are asked about fairness, group work— especially group grades—are often at the top of their list of unfair practices. We believe that when teachers hew to the four principles outlined here as they plan collaborative tasks and projects, group work can be a highly satisfying experience for students. **EL**

[1]Good rubrics for this purpose can be found in Brookhart, 2013, pp. 9, 12 and on the Learning Sciences International website.

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Amir Rasooli is a doctoral candidate in educational assessment and measurement at Queen's University, Canada. Amir's research focuses on enhancing fairness and equity in assessment. **Susan M. Brookhart** is professor emerita in the School of Education at Duquesne University and author of many books, including *Grading and Group Work: How Do I Assess Individual Learning When Students Work Together?* (ASCD, 2013). Follow them on Twitter @AmirRasooli15 and @SusanBrookhart.

SOCRATICS, REMIXED

A lesson design for more focused and engaging student-led discussions.

Henry Seton

As more classrooms return to in-person instruction, many teachers (including myself) are longing for lessons built around student discussion. Student discourse frequently floundered over the past year amidst inconsistent camera usage, weak microphones, internet lags, and the overall awkwardness of virtual classrooms.

The Socratic seminar is a particularly seductive lesson structure. Its origins reach back as far as ancient Greece and more recently to influential 20th century educators such as Mortimer Adler. Exact definitions vary, but in its most essential form, students gather into one or more circles to discuss a text. They take the lead in not only formulating ideas but also constructing the questions that guide their discourse.[1] Educators, in turn, are drawn to the potential for student-directed inquiry, critical questioning, and collaborative teamwork—not to mention the possibility of sitting back and putting the heavy lifting on students' shoulders.

Yet Socratic seminars frequently fall flat. Teachers can intervene too much or too little. We can rely on complex protocols that overly restrict student discourse or conversely fail to provide adequate scaffolds. Students can arrive unprepared. Discussion can dwindle into long, awkward silences or drift into tangents and lose any sense of urgency. Rigor can evaporate. Without careful calibration, Socratics result in lost lessons.

Many teachers have experimented with lesson design elements to address these issues. For example, Alexis Wiggins has developed an approach where the whole class gets the same grade for the seminar to encourage all students to participate and collaborate.[2] Over the past decade, however, I have developed an approach to Socratic seminars with my high school English students that I have yet to encounter in the literature or in dozens of school visits. This approach, what I call a remixed Socratic, has heightened the rigor and urgency of my class discussions while simultaneously increasing engagement, collaboration, and joy. And this method, I have found, can work effectively with other subjects and age groups beyond high school English.

Remixing the Classic Structure

In reworking the Socratic lesson, I sought to empower my students as problem-posing scholars while still maximizing the impact of every instructional minute and allowing for individualized data collection. I wanted a design that would improve students' skills not only as discussants but also as readers and writers. And I needed a simple yet versatile structure. I wanted to use it repeatedly during a unit without boring students. I also wanted to be able to target whatever student growth areas might arise.

This approach organically integrates the holy trinity of literacy skills: reading, writing, and discussing. Because students do not know what passage is going to be on the exit ticket, class becomes a treasure hunt.

I hit upon the idea of developing an individual post-discussion assessment that would meet these criteria. Socratic lessons typically end with some sort of silent writing task—a final take on the ideas in the discussion, a reflection on the discussion process itself, or some combination of the two. I wanted to find an alternative assessment that would encourage students to bring greater focus and urgency to their conversations, but would not straight-jacket student discourse.

I eventually settled on what English teachers call a *passage analysis* or *passage identification assessment*—a common summative English language arts exam in high school and college. For those not familiar, this approach usually

takes the form of a test that asks students to identify and analyze a variety of passages from the entire semester. For each excerpt, students must not only identify the text and author but also contextualize and closely read the text. Students are typically asked to make connections to relevant moments and larger themes outside the passage, so it requires broader comprehension as well.

Over time, I mixed this method into my Socratic lesson design, so that open-ended student discussions are anchored by a brief passage-analysis assessment at the end of *each class* as a low-stakes exit ticket. See Figure 1 for a description of what an hour-long lesson might look like.

This revised lesson structure is simple, but its elements work together powerfully. The approach organically integrates the holy trinity of literacy skills: reading, writing, and discussing. Because students do *not* know what passage is going to be on the exit ticket, class becomes a treasure hunt in which students must do the work of identifying and discussing the most important passages. Because there are most likely multiple salient passages, students cannot spend the whole time digging into just one; they have to work together to balance depth and breadth in their analyses.

Students take notes during the discussion, since even the strongest readers will not have explicated every textual nuance ahead of time, and

FIGURE 1. Sample Remixed Socratic Lesson: *Gem of the Ocean* Act 2, Scene 1	
1) Pre-work: Students read assigned text before class—e.g., a chapter in a novel or a selection of poems.	Students read and annotate Act 2, Scene 1 of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* for homework with a focus on key themes that I previewed at the front end of the unit.
2) Warm-up (10 min): Students evaluate an exit ticket or two from the previous lesson, usually in a write-pair-share format.	Students silently read Monique's exit ticket from the previous day and then write about what she does well and what could be stronger. I chose her exit ticket because she is struggling with embedded quotations, which is a growth area for many of her peers as well. After students talk briefly with a partner, I cold-call on students to share their thoughts. Before moving on, I make sure to emphasize a class-wide focus area (embedded quotations) captured by Monique's work and ask them to revise her writing right then and there with this focus area in mind.
3) Discussion (30 min): In one to three large groups, students identify the most important passages from the homework reading, close-read these passages together, and connect them to larger themes.	Students circle up into two simultaneous discussion groups. I sit in the middle between the two circles and mostly take notes—only jumping in occasionally if I am worried they are getting off track. In their groups, students take turns highlighting key passages from the homework and analyzing them together. For example, Kerwean might point her peers to Solly's long monologue early in the scene and ask if they think it sheds light on the theme of economic freedom. A few minutes later, Jeremy might ask about the stolen bucket of nails and wonder if it might be a symbol to unpack. Students work quickly to explicate a handful of moments like this in their groups before time runs out.
4) Exit ticket (20 min): Students have to write a page in which they identify, contextualize, and analyze a passage chosen by me (their teacher) from the reading they did for homework.	I put one of the important passages from the homework—a monologue by Aunt Esther about the nails—on the exit ticket. Students, working independently without their books, now have to identify first who is speaking to whom and what is happening in that moment. Then students close-read the passage and connect it to larger themes and other relevant moments in the book. While they silently write, I circulate and coach them on their writing skills.

I allow students to reference these notes during the exit ticket. Students are also incentivized to collaborate more conscientiously, because the more effectively they identify and analyze key passages, the more likely they will be to crush the exit ticket.

While students are initially intimidated by the pop quiz awaiting them at the end of each lesson, most quickly become fans. I interviewed several former 10th grade students, who, even years later, recalled the format fondly. Iverson loved the challenge and compared it to leading his own bible study group because everyone could bring their own interpretations to the table. Sam said these remixed Socratics reminded him of a "themed potluck" where all the dishes work together as a well-balanced meal. Judeline felt "like a teacher for a day [or] a college student, with a more independent role." Satoya likened the process to a *Where's Waldo?* book because students "have to look closely and sift through the text." Even though she is a strong reader, Satoya said she had to work carefully with her peers because they would inevitably find key moments that she missed.

Secrets of Success

Within this relatively simple lesson structure, there is room for nuance, so let's examine three elements of this design in more depth: the *warm-up*, *discussion*, and *assessment*.

The Warm-Up

The warm-up can be used for many purposes—such as a quick reading quiz for accountability or brief vocabulary drills. However, I find that a read-write-pair-share activity examining earlier student work is often most fruitful. Early in the unit, students might silently examine for a few minutes an exemplary exit ticket written by a peer during the previous lesson, identifying and explaining a few strengths of it, and if there is time, considering how to improve it. During a later lesson, a teacher might juxtapose a stronger and weaker exit ticket before asking students to explain which is stronger and why. If time permits, students could even revise the weaker one to match the quality of the stronger one.

The Discussion

Before the first major discussion, teachers should explain the overall lesson structure to students—that they will need to identify and analyze key passages with an eye to being prepared for the surprise passage on the exit ticket. It is helpful to do a quick think-pair-share mini-lesson beforehand about what clues indicate that a passage might be important and worthy of discussion. The class can then brainstorm and take notes on these clues. We might, for example, discuss how a lengthy speech by a character or the reoccurrence of a symbol could indicate a passage's significance. I also often model how to make comments in the form of a question to spur and deepen a textual conversation. Even if students are unclear about the meaning of a particular passage or symbol, they can point peers to it and ask for their input, maybe sharing a few tentative hypotheses as they do.

Each day, it helps to give students a few minutes to test out their initial thinking about the reading in smaller duos or trios before the larger discussion begins. During the larger group discussions, teachers should keep their own remarks to a minimum. While the teacher may want to intervene occasionally in the first few lessons—for example, to encourage students to slow down or speed up their analysis of a particular passage—most of the heavy lifting should be done by the students. The students should feel that the onus is on them to identify and explicate the key passages without counting on the teacher to rescue them.

For early discussions, teachers may want to keep students in one larger group to better monitor and coach their discourse. Later on, however, shifting to multiple simultaneous groups will allow students to double or triple their opportunities to participate. After the discussion, the teacher might take a couple of minutes to debrief with the whole class. The teacher can lift up moments of skillful facilitation or insightful analysis that the whole class can learn from. After some time, students can often lead debriefs like this on their own.

The Assessment

Lastly, how does regular assessment work within this lesson design? In addition to the occasional reading quiz, I recommend daily in-class homework checks for some sort of meaningful reader response, whether sticky-note annotations in their book or a two-column journal. Teachers will likely want to grade discussions to encourage participation by quieter students. I usually do not grade for the quality of student responses since students already have an incentive to work as efficiently as possible, but I do track the frequency of their participation on a clipboard (or enlist student volunteers to do this for me).

I typically enter this as a small classwork grade every few days. That way, students who struggle to join the discussion one day can make up for it with their participation another day. I also award daily bonus points to the students who first lead their peers to the passage chosen for each day's exit ticket—a beloved bit of daily suspense and gamification!

As for the exit ticket itself, I tend to choose just one passage for each lesson for students to analyze and then ask students to write anywhere from a paragraph to a couple pages of text. The basic *who*, *what*, *how* prompts are as follows:

■ *Who* is talking? *Who* are they talking to?

■ *What* is happening at this moment? *What* is the context?

■ *How* does this moment shed light on the larger themes of the text? Make sure to close-read for the significance of at least a couple words or phrases in the text.

I usually give students anywhere from 5–20 minutes to work on this. Students at first often benefit from more time to craft their analyses and can start their nightly readings once they are done.

Some teachers may have the capacity to grade them each day while others might grade only one lesson's worth of exit tickets per week. Either way, feedback can be brief—as simple as a quick grade, a commendation, and a recommendation. The grade can be based on the accuracy of students' contextualization and the depth of their analysis, but it can be tailored to whatever reading and writing skills the class is working on. Typically, a student who meets expectations correctly identifies the "who" and "what" of the passage as well as close-reads at least a couple phrases for thematic development. Students can exceed expectations

through even more extensive and/ or less obvious analyses. Even if teachers do not grade each day's exit ticket, they can still circulate and give formative feedback while students write them in class.

And what about a culminating assessment? While one can end a Socratic-centered unit like this with a longer, multi-day paper, the natural conclusion is a longer passage-identification test similar to the exit tickets students have been completing daily. Since many students may be new to the longer passage-analysis test

> ## I have yet to find a more potent student-centered lesson design for my English classes.

format, it is useful beforehand to do one final think-pair-share mini-lesson in which you ask students to brainstorm how to study for such an assessment—for example, by having a family member quiz them on randomly chosen passages or building a set of notes about key symbols and their meanings. That said, students usually excel on these final passage-analysis tests since they have been practicing this skill in each lesson and usually have plentiful notes to support their studying.

That Magic Balance
Is this lesson design so perfect that I use it for every unit? Hardly. There is a place for assigning longer papers, at least quarterly. I also find that this type of lesson goes better in the second half of the year after I have used more traditional lesson structures to teach and model various

close- and open-reading strategies. And when students are infectiously and insatiably engaged by a text, I sometimes drop the exit ticket quiz and revert to the traditional, more open-ended Socratic lesson structure.

That said, I have yet to find a more potent student-centered lesson design for my English classes. This principle of pairing open-ended, student-centered discussions with a more focused, individual post-assessment can easily be applied to other subjects as well. History teachers could have students read and discuss a packet of primary sources—à la the document-based question on the AP U.S. history exam—before choosing one source for students to analyze independently for the exit ticket. STEM teachers could have students wrestle with a textbook chapter or problem set in groups before choosing one concept or word problem to break down on their own at the end of class.

This remixed lesson structure is far from perfect; but it is a starting point for further innovation using student-centered discussions. I hope teachers continue to refine this method and share their results as we continue to pursue lesson designs that find that magic balance between autonomy and accountability, between joy and urgency. ⓔⓛ

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Henry Seton (hseton@gmail.com) is a humanities teacher-leader, writer, and presenter. He formerly chaired the humanities department at the Community Charter School of Cambridge in Massachusetts. Follow him on Twitter @HenrySeton.

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Improving Lesson Planning with Pre-Work

When teachers have time to think ahead and do pre-work, instructional planning meetings gain focus.

Jessica Holloway and Rebecca Doxsee

Educators have many "meetings of the minds": Grade-level planning sessions, PLCs, coaching meetings—which together should allow teachers ample opportunities to create high-quality, rigorous lesson plans that deepen student learning.

But do these meetings actually work? Frequent planning sessions often become a time for teachers to discuss the standards for the week, think about the content, or talk about what they may or may not use. But before they know it, the bell rings, and the only thing accomplished is an *idea* of what *might* be taught to students the following day or week.

There's a way to prevent such missed opportunities, however. If teachers are able to brainstorm, think, and/or reflect *before* they come to a collaborative planning session, the meetings themselves could be more productive and helpful. Preparing for planning can make teachers' time together richer and generate better ideas.

What Really Happens in "Planning Sessions"

Over the years, the phrase "planning session" has taken on many different definitions in education. Some schools use this time for professional development, delivering

school initiatives, or faculty or grade-level meetings. Coaches may use this time to discuss the data, weekly reports, or the newest school initiative with teachers. Researcher Eileen Merritt notes that teachers have reported that planning time is critical to their job satisfaction, and that adding planning time would positively affect their ability to help students reach their potential.[1] When "planning" time is used for a myriad of reasons, however, teachers often feel frustrated about the lack of time for . . . actually planning lessons. Since additional meeting time is usually not an option, we must shift our focus to how to maximize allotted planning time.

As an instructional coach for seven priority schools in Hamilton County, Tennessee, coauthor Rebecca Doxsee spends time in classrooms and works with coaches to support student academic success. Because planning is where the magic happens, she initially spent time discussing with building-level coaches and principals the school's requirements for planning sessions. Then she attended several planning sessions with teachers. There seemed to be a recurring theme in these discussions and planning meetings: Lesson planning wasn't happening. Discussion about content and assessment was happening, but no deep discussions around rigorous learning tasks, guiding questions, or student discourse were taking place. Teachers were leaving their planning meetings with only a few or no completed lessons, which meant they had to spend even more time on their own to do the hardest parts of planning: alignment, rigor, and differentiation. This prompted Rebecca to try a new approach to maximize planning time.

Preparing for Planning

Rebecca's new approach was "preparing for planning," which provides teachers independent time to "pre-think and prepare" for planning meetings, resulting in a more powerful and meaningful session time with grade-level teams and coaches. When teachers come to the table with prior knowledge of the relevant tasks and content, their individual ownership of the process increases and richer conversations around the components and direction of the lesson can take place.

Teachers should be given at least 30–45 minutes prior to planning meetings to prepare for planning. This time can come from a teacher's individual planning time during school or before or after the school day.

Coauthor Jessica Holloway has found that "pre-thinking" activities using technology can extend teachers' collaborative planning time and expand access to shared lesson plans. Teachers can create a shared document prior

Teachers create a digital record of the pre-thinking and prep work needed to develop and improve lesson plans for years to come.

to the official planning session to capture their thinking and allow each person to contribute initial thoughts and processes. The shared document can have different starting points, depending on the goal of the planning session and content area: a question, list of standards, previous lessons, or a text, to name a few options. Creating this document ahead of time allows teachers to process independently and add their ideas before the group meeting. This method also allows exceptional education teachers, English Language Learner teachers, and educational assistants to participate in preparing for planning, setting the groundwork for more meaningful and equitable conversations for all students in the classroom. Best of all, technology tools can create a digital documentation of each teacher's thoughts, ideas, plans, and reflections—the pre-thinking and prep work needed to develop and improve lesson plans for years to come.

Preparing for planning includes these three phases: Be the Learner, Be the Curator, and Be the Planner.

Be the Learner

In this phase, teachers examine a part of the curriculum and take on the role of a learner—that is, they put themselves in their students' shoes. For literacy planning, they might annotate, mark up a text assigned to students with highlights, jot notes and questions, and

> When "planning" time is used for a myriad of reasons, teachers often feel frustrated about the lack of time for actually planning lessons.

circle key points, like they would as a reader. For mathematics or science planning, they can work out a math problem as if they were doing it for the first time, or analyze a science text and graphs. In other words, they experience the task *as a learner* without an agenda or preconceived ideas.

Once teachers can empathize with a learner's perspective of approaching the text or task, they are ready to examine the learning event to critically evaluate strengths and shortcomings:

■ How can the annotations, questions, or comments guide them in designing the lesson to help students better grasp the information?

■ What sections may need to be clarified?

■ Is there a place students can or should connect to prior lessons?

■ What background knowledge is required for students to understand the concept or idea?

■ What vocabulary is needed for students to grasp the concept or central idea?

■ What tools, videos, collaborative spaces, and digital platforms can be used to eliminate barriers and increase student engagement?

To make their thinking visible while acting as the learner, teachers have two options to document annotations, questions, and notes. One path is to use digital annotation tools. When using a Google document, Microsoft Word, or Kami document, teachers can highlight, strikethrough, make and/or assign comments, insert links, and color-code annotations, to name a few features. If the tasks are not digital, teachers can make annotations on a physical document and take a photo of their mark-ups on their phone or laptop. Both versions can be stored and shared using a digital drive (such as OneDrive, Google Drive, or Dropbox). Keeping a digital copy of the teacher's annotated work creates a model for students and provides insight into potential barriers to student learning.

Be the Curator

The next phase of pre-planning asks teachers to review all the relevant published instructional and assessment resources provided in the curriculum for the particular lesson or unit (quizzes, comprehension questions, writing prompts). This helps the teachers organize their thinking around the trajectory of learning and the goal of the planning session and prevents them from "recreating the wheel" when resources are already available. Teachers can pick and choose from various sources to help them create and align a strong opening, learning task, and assessment to maximize student learning.

To organize the curation, teachers can use something as simple as a document with hyperlinks to various resources and work samples. Another option is to create a collection on Wakelet, which allows teachers to add links, upload images and documents, and add text (notes) and content from other applications into one collected group. Having all resources available in one location can expedite the planning process by eliminating time spent searching for desired resources.

Be the Planner

Planning requires teachers to think backward to move forward. What do they want their students to produce at the end of the lesson

that will show they mastered the skill or standard? In shifting the approach to planning, teachers are asked to focus on the end goal instead of the beginning. Once teachers have determined how students will demonstrate mastery, then learning targets for the trajectory of lessons can be chosen or designed that best align to the standard(s) of the lesson. In starting this process of backward planning, teachers can ask themselves:

■ Which standard(s) can be captured in this text (or problem or concept)? (In most cases, curricula will have several standards associated with a text or task, so reading the text or doing the task ahead of time will help teachers understand which standard or standards should be the focus of the daily lesson.)

■ What are the most important concepts, ideas, or skills we want students to grasp and apply?

■ How will students demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives?

Planning with the end in mind may require a clear learning target to be written in a way that captures only part of the standard(s) taught during the lesson. The alignment of the clear learning target and exit ticket (assessment) with the learning task is critical in making sure that students understand the why *and* how of the lesson.

To plan out the path to mastery, teachers can use digital tools such as Google Jamboard, which provides a collaborative space for teachers to post notes and images, rearrange ideas or lessons, and draw connections between items. Padlet is a similar collaboration platform where teachers can add notes, links, and videos or images while being able to drag and drop to rearrange items. There are also a variety of online whiteboard options (such as Whiteboard.fi or Explain Everything) to use for sketching out a plan for student mastery.

With digital tools available for each phase of preparing for planning, links to created

Preparing for planning can make teachers' time together richer and generate better ideas.

items can be included in required lesson or unit planning documents to preserve teachers' thinking and preparation process.

More Meaningful Meetings
With preparing for planning completed, teachers are now ready for in-person collaboration and to be the designers of learning experiences for students, thus eliminating the "in-the-moment" or "on-the-spot" decision making. Teachers and coaches are equipped to engage in deeper conversations and prevent misaligned lesson planning. Conversations move from just talking about standards or curriculum resources to how students will learn and demonstrate mastery, ensuring all components—curriculum, instruction, and assessment—are aligned.

This focused conversation keeps teachers from getting stuck in the "what" of lessons, and they are not left alone to make tough instructional decisions. They can be thoughtful and intentional in exploring engaging strategies, questions, and knowledge checks to ensure that students are on the path to mastery. Lesson design discussions may also include:

■ What questions can be used or developed to provide access for all students?

■ What instructional strategy will effectively

The lesson plan is a vehicle that moves the learning forward, a record of the student learning process, and a teacher roadmap of the instructional journey.

move students towards mastery?

■ Does the lesson require direction instruction, modeling, and/or gradual release?

■ How can you strategically plan for student discourse that will impact student learning?

■ What technology tool or platform will enhance or extend student learning?

■ How do I intentionally provide equity of student voice?

■ What modifications can be made to adhere to a student's individualized education program, 504 plan, or individualized language learner program?

Valuing the Process

When teachers realize how much time they can save by implementing a collaborative pre-paring for planning framework versus creating lesson plans on their own, the shift can be easy. However, we know that for teachers to feel the need to change, they have to see a difference in student learning. "No matter how big an 'effect size' research shows for the innovation, people usually aren't convinced it will work until they see it make a difference for their students," says Jim Knight.[2] "This creates a catch-22: People don't like to implement a new strategy unless they have seen it be effective, but they can't experience its effectiveness unless they try it."

As teachers internalize the "preparing for planning" process and see how it leads to improved lesson planning, the shift in practice will have tangible benefits, such as more effective planning sessions, aligned formative assessments, high-quality tasks, and shared ownership of student learning. Moreover, the impact on student learning becomes visible and affirms the process.

Keeping students engaged in any learning environment can prove to be challenging if we do not know our destination. The lesson plan

is a vehicle that moves the learning forward, a record of the student learning process, and a teacher roadmap of the instructional journey. When teachers do the work beforehand, it makes the learning trip safer and allows teachers to remove barriers, plan for stops, and prevent students from running into dead ends. Preparing to plan is the best map for getting us to our final destination: student success.

Though some teachers may view preparing for planning as "just one more thing," when the process is implemented well, teachers begin to see the value in having the pre-work done and realize how planning sessions can produce high-quality, engaging lesson plans that are ready to be implemented. It takes support from instructional coaches and administrators to help teachers take the hard step of changing a routine that has been "working" for several months, or even years; however, with the proper support, teachers can begin to value the time they gain back. Once teachers see they no longer have to do the "hard" part alone, and that purposeful lessons can be created in their allotted planning periods, preparing for planning becomes a welcome change in practice. **EL**

[1]Merritt, E. (2016). Time for teacher learning, planning critical for school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 98,* 31–36.

[2]Knight, J. (2021). Moving from talk to action in professional learning. *Educational Leadership, 78*(5), 16–21.

Jessica Holloway is an innovation coach for Hamilton County Schools in Tennessee, a 2019 ASCD Emerging Leader, and a Tennessee ASCD board member. **Rebecca Doxsee** is an area learning coach for priority schools in Hamilton County Schools in Tennessee. Follow them on Twitter @hollowayreader and @r_doxsee.

Autistic at the IEP Table

Remember, disabilities aren't confined to students. Small changes to IEP proceedings can make a big difference for some parents.

Julie Antilla-Garza

In early December 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team at my son's school met with me online about supporting my autistic son in his general education social studies class. As I looked at the many faces on the screen who had gathered to support my son, I realized how grateful I was that they provided key accommodations for me as well. I, like my son, am autistic. I was diagnosed with autism three years ago, and I want to share what has helped and hindered me as I've worked with my son's team around the IEP table. I hope that it will prompt educators to consider reasonable

accommodations for adults, as well as for students, when gathering for IEP meetings.

The Gift of Accommodations

As of 2017, more than two percent of the adult population in the United States had been diagnosed with autism,[1] with females often receiving their diagnoses later in life than males.[2] Most educators are familiar with autism in children, but there are many autistic adults who interact with the school system as well. I was an educator in public preK–12 schools for 16 years, working as a classroom teacher, a program director, and a school principal.

Most educators are familiar with autism in children, but there are many autistic adults who interact with the school system as well.

During those years, I attended more than 100 IEP meetings, most of them as an administrator. While those experiences have definitely informed the way I view IEP meetings, it is very different to attend such meetings as a parent.

My son's IEP team has provided several gifts of accommodations that have allowed us to work together productively. I call them gifts because I have not had to push the team to provide the accommodations I need. I have been a member of this IEP team longer than I've had my diagnosis, and we have worked together over the years to find what practices work best. Knowing how beneficial accommodations can be, I would encourage IEP case managers to ask family members before IEP meetings what accommodations they might need to successfully participate on the team. I can identify five accommodations that have made a significant difference in my experience as an IEP team member.

The first accommodation began when my son was in 3rd grade and his special education case manager took note of my processing speed in the IEP meetings. She initiated the practice of taking periodic breaks from talking so that I could have time to catch up on writing my notes. This gift of time kept me from asking questions out of context or needing statements repeated.

Related to this accommodation is the second: the gift of processing discussions before actions are taken on the IEP. The special education director who attends my son's IEP meetings determined that it would be good for the team to wait for a few days after meetings before revising any IEP items to give me time as the parent to think about proposed changes. This communicated to me that the team knew my input was as essential as theirs in key decisions for my son's education.

The third and fourth gifts are so common that they may hardly need mentioning, but they are powerful, and I'd be remiss to exclude them. My son's IEP team always makes sure to send me copies of draft IEPs and potential goals in advance of meetings. They ask for my draft goals as well. This advanced sharing makes the IEP meeting much more efficient. I have also appreciated the gift of prompt responses to any communication I have with the members of the IEP team. I usually write emails as opposed to making phone calls, and I have found that the timing as well as the content of the response emails are supportive. I have received multiple emails from team members sharing their compassion, empathy, and respect. They acknowledge that the IEP process is hard and that we are all learning in the journey with my son.

After one particularly emotional IEP meeting, I received an email that encouraged me to "hang in there" and to be kind to myself. This was not necessary for the functioning of the IEP process, but it did prompt me to trust the IEP team more than I would have otherwise. Other emails have stated clearly that the team wants my son to succeed and that we share the same ultimate goal for his academic journey. As a parent, this makes me feel that my contributions are valued. These emails put

me at ease, and they reduce my anxiety as an autistic parent with a key role at the IEP table.

The fifth gift from the IEP team is perhaps the most amazing. My son's IEP team allows takebacks! There have been a few times when I have agreed to a change in services and then discovered that it was not best for my son. I've been able to reconvene the team to tell them that I want to take back my consent, and they've agreed. While there is language to support this in the procedural safeguards, it still feels meaningful to have the IEP team listen and agree with my parental choice. All these accommodations make the IEP table a more welcoming place for this autistic parent.

Complex Needs, Ongoing Challenges

These gifts outweigh the challenges I have at the IEP table, but there are still some challenges. First, it is not uncommon to have a dozen people at my son's IEP meetings. My son has complex needs, so he has many educators who support him. I am often physically uncomfortable in a small, enclosed room with the limited physical space that it affords each of us around the table.

Due to the sheer number of attendees, I often encounter a second challenge: I find it hard to remember the team members' names and roles. I do not remember the pairing of names with faces, so even if the team members have introduced themselves to me several times, I have difficulty remembering who each one is in a large group setting. Holding IEP meetings virtually helps with this because the names of the participants are listed on the bottom of each picture.

There are also the typical sensory challenges—lighting and sound—that are amplified in an IEP meeting. There is almost always ambient noise in school meeting rooms. Neurotypical individuals can filter out background noise and focus on the conversation. This is not easy, and sometimes not possible, for me as an autistic individual to do. All noise is distracting noise—have you noticed how loud electronic equipment and HVAC systems are in schools?

> **The biggest challenge for me as an autistic parent at the IEP table is that I do not know if I am interpreting certain facial and vocal expressions accurately.**

It can be an added challenge if students and adults are moving around and talking outside of the meeting room. One of my more memorable IEP meetings took place in a conference room that looked out at the parking lot. In the middle of the meeting, the car closest to the building had its car alarm triggered. What made it worse was I realized that the car with the obnoxious alarm was mine! I was thoroughly distracted on multiple levels at that point.

But the biggest challenge for me as an autistic parent at the IEP table is that I do not know if I am interpreting certain facial and vocal expressions accurately. Sharing a common understanding of all modes of communication is especially important in IEP meetings because a lack of uptake can be interpreted as being oppositional to the gentle guiding or suggestions being made. I know that there are most likely messages being conveyed, so I am always trying to figure out what they are. I try to pick

> Allowing family members to attend IEP meetings via online synchronous conferencing will likely increase attendance as well as put autistic family members more at ease during the meetings.

up on the slightest eye movement or change of tone to decipher the hidden meanings I may be missing. This takes my focus away from the content of the meeting and negatively impacts my processing speed. One way to minimize this challenge would be to have educators commit to being direct when conveying their reporting, their concerns, and their suggestions in IEP meetings.

The Plus Side of Virtual Meetings

As an autistic parent participating in IEP meetings, I've come to prefer video conferencing using Zoom or Microsoft Teams to in-person meetings. In addition to being able to avoid some of the challenges listed above, I have found four distinct advantages to online, synchronous meetings. First, as mentioned, participants' names are displayed—which gives me the opportunity to address an educator by name without having to remember it or worry I may have gotten it wrong. Second, I never have to make direct eye contact, which I find to be distracting to the point that I am not able to track the conversation or understand what is being said. In virtual meetings, I don't have to look directly at the camera to look like I'm participating—facing the screen is enough. Third, I can choose to look at only one face at a time to help my concentration. Other space and sensory issues commonly found around the IEP table are also minimized, and I can control my own environment.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, I can look at my own image to make sure that I am *masking* appropriately. *Masking* is the term for when autistic individuals work to make their facial expressions and bodily movements appear neurotypical. Since I know that my facial expressions often don't convey to others

the emotions that I am experiencing, by looking at myself on screen, I can make sure that I am appearing interested, pleased, or concerned at appropriate times in the meeting.

For these reasons, I hope that schools will consider keeping virtual meeting options available even after everyone is back to a full-time, in-person instructional setting. Allowing family members to attend IEP meetings via online synchronous conferencing will likely increase attendance as well as put autistic family members more at ease during the meetings.

Show You Care

As educators, we can often get in the mindset that we work with students with disabilities and forget that many of the adults we work with have disabilities, too. But if educators work to understand and accommodate the adults as well as the students they interact with, it can minimize the challenges of family members with disabilities. Whether an IEP team member has an identified disability or not, caring for them and accommodating their needs will help make the IEP process smooth and successful. **EL**

[1]Dietz, P. M., Rose, C. E., McArthur, D., & Maenner, M. (2020). National and state estimates of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 50*, 4258–4266.

[2]Leedham, A., Thompson, A. R., & Smith, R. (2020). 'I was exhausted trying to figure it out': The experiences of females receiving an autism diagnosis in middle to late adulthood. *Autism, 24*(1), 135–146.

Julie Antilla-Garza is an associate professor of educational leadership at Seattle Pacific University. She worked for 16 years in preK–12 education in California before transitioning to higher education. Follow her on Twitter @autisticprofJAG.

DEEPER DIVE:
Lesson-Planning and Instructional Resources Highlighted in This Issue

Strategic Use of Technology

Tasks Before Apps: Designing Rigorous Learning in a Tech-Rich Classroom (ASCD, 2017) by Monica Burns. Burns share strategies, tools, and insights that teachers can use to effectively incorporate technology in the classroom, with an emphasis on the "three C's" of creation, curiosity, and collaboration.

Google Jamboard, a free whiteboard space, one of several open-ended creation tools that give students engaging ways to map out ideas or demonstrate their learning.

TED-Ed has collaborated with educators and TED speakers to create free video-based lessons, as well a tool to help teachers plan lessons based on short, engaging videos.

Addressing Learning Gaps

Learning in the Fast Lane: 8 Ways to Put All Students on the Road to Success by Suzy Pepper Rollins (ASCD, 2014). Rollins lays out a plan of action teachers can use to immediately move underperforming students in the right direction and differentiate instruction for all learners, without falling into the remediation trap.

"Prioritizing the Standards Using R.E.A.L. Criteria" by Tom W. Many and Ted Horrell (TEPSA NEWS, February 2014). Educators Many and Horrell outline a framework for identifying essential content standards—a key for targeted lesson and unit planning.

Teaching Innovation

The i5 Approach: Lesson Planning That Teaches Thinking and Fosters Innovation by Jane E. Pollock and Susan Hensley (2018, ASCD). Pollock and Hensley explain the five i's—*information*, *images*, *interaction*, *inquiry*, and *innovation*—and how they contribute to student learning. They provide step-by-step procedures for teaching 12 key thinking skills and share lesson examples from teachers who have successfully "i5'ed" their instruction.

High-Quality Lesson Planning (Quick Reference Guide) by Jane E. Pollock, Susan Hensley, and Laura Tolone (ASCD). In this brief guide, the authors present GANAG, a classroom-tested, five-step schema for planning effective instruction.

Evaluating Curriculum Units

Solving 25 Problems in Unit Design: How Do I Refine My Units to Enhance Student Learning? by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins (ASCD, 2015). In this short book, Wiggins and McTighe

describe the 25 most common problems in unit design and recommend ways to fix them—and avoid them when planning new units.

[Understanding by Design Video Series](#) (ASCD). Based on the pioneering work by Wiggins and McTighe, this video series goes through the steps of designing curricular units that promote deep content understanding and provides an overview of the powerful concepts in Understanding by Design. Interviews with teachers describe real-world applications of the unit-planning process.

Designing Standards-Based Units

[Charting a Course to Standards-Based Grading: What to Stop, What to Start, and Why It Matters](#) by Tim R. Westerberg (ASCD, 2016). Former principal Westerberg outlines a framework, along with a continuum of options, to ensure alignment between *stated* curriculum, *taught* curriculum, and *assessed* curriculum.

[“Five Professional Learning Transformations for a Post-COVID World”](#) by Douglas Reeves (*Educational Leadership*, February 2021). Effective unit planning begins with identifying a limited number of overarching or enduring standards and moving from what Reeves calls “fragmentation to focus.”

[“Grades That Show What Students Know”](#) by Robert Marzano and Tammy Heflebower (*Educational Leadership*, November 2011). This article on standards-based grading includes an example of a proficiency scale that that can be used for planning, assessment, and instruction.

Universal Design for Learning

[The UDL Guidelines](#) from CAST are a set of suggestions, presented in graphic-organizer format, that educators can use to ensure their lessons provide greater opportunities for student access and understanding. The guidelines are organized across the UDL domains of engagement, representation, and action/expression.

Socratic Seminars

The [National Paideia Center](#), cofounded by the philosopher Mortimer J. Adler, offers teaching and planning resources on Socratic seminars.

[Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School](#) by Matt Copeland (Stenhouse, 2004). This coaching guide offers straightforward answers to frequent questions on Socratic seminars.

Additional ASCD Resources

[“Designing Authentic Performance Tasks and Projects”](#) (on-demand webinar). ASCD authors Jay McTighe, Kristina Doubet, and Eric Carbaugh offer in-depth advice and examples on planning for authentic performance tasks and longer projects in the classroom.

[Improving Every Lesson With SEL](#) by Jeffrey Benson (ASCD, 2021). Benson draws from his 40-plus years of experience as a teacher and administrator to provide explicit, step-by-step guidance on how to incorporate social and emotional learning into lesson planning—without imposing a separate SEL curriculum.

[New Teacher's Companion](#) (Chapter 7) by Gini Cunningham (ASCD, 2009). This chapter of Cunningham's foundational book for new teachers discusses the basic building blocks of lesson planning, including an eight-phase model that engages students by building on their knowledge.

DRAZEN ZIGIC / SHUTTERSTOCK

Tell Us About

How has pandemic-era teaching influenced your lesson planning?

The "Fake Test"

When is a test not a test? When it's one students have to take during a worldwide pandemic.

The pandemic has made me completely re-examine the planning and purpose of a traditional Latin test. Is it so students can prove they've mastered the dative case? Or the academic skills they need to practise as engaged learners? Or is it the chance to develop that sense of connection that students so deeply crave? Rather than choosing just one, why can't our lesson have it all?

With students on board for the experiment, we set about planning how to have our cake and eat it too. I created a "Fake Test" assignment, which was broken down into three steps. In the first step, I asked students, either individually or in small groups, to come up with test questions. These were used for their practice and preparation, not for the actual "Fake Test" experience. For step two, inspired by their exemplars, I composed the actual "Fake Test." Although students completed it under "real" testing conditions, I told them the test would not be graded, and so the stakes were low.

Afterward each student received the answer key to a different section of the test. Then they paired up to share their test responses. Their partner would identify errors

by coaching them through making corrections (answering questions, giving clues, explaining concepts), all without giving away the actual answer. This allowed our physically distanced and cohorted students to connect, share, and support each other in their learning.

The "Fake Test" results were fascinating. Students who usually struggle on tests really learned and ended up "owning" their errors, feeling more confident about their understanding of the concepts. Students who traditionally do well on tests found it a welcome challenge having to make their thinking process explicit, thus also consolidating their learning. I definitely plan on continuing this experience with students upon our return to in-person learning.

—Diana Pai, Classics teacher, Languages Curriculum and Department Leader, Saint Clement's School, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Becoming More Tech-Savvy

The challenge was to figure out how to use best instructional practices while teaching remotely. I chose to get Level 1 Google Certification and become a Seesaw Pioneer to make the task easier. I used that knowledge to recreate my assignments, projects, and formative and summative assessments in digital formats. Like most

"The challenge was to figure out how to use best instructional practices while teaching remotely."

teachers during the pandemic, my technology knowledge increased, and I learned many new apps and programs. I have a Viewsonic Viewboard and a tablet, so I was able to have the whole class on the viewboard and teach small group on my tablet. This allowed me to do reading and math groups. I also had material pick-ups so I could give art and project materials to my students. We took several virtual field trips through the [California Department of Parks and Recreation](#), [Walk Through Ancient Civilizations](#), STEMapalooza, and Earth Day websites. I was put to the test with distance learning, but I truly feel that I provided my students with an engaging, quality 6th grade year.

—Roseann Graf, 6th Grade Teacher, Wickman Elementary, Chino Valley Unified School District, Chino Hills, California

Less Is More
"Less is more" has been the greatest change in the way we have approached lesson planning. We identify priorities in our standards and ensure time is spent on checking for understanding, using strategies such as cold calling, waterfall chat, and constant questioning.

Teaching for "stickability" has helped remind us about what it is that we want students to learn. What do we want them to take away and remember from that day's lesson?

We've focused on one activity and allowed students time to go deeper into the learning rather than moving from one activity to the next without time for students to stop, learn, and consolidate. We also try to talk less and listen more. Giving students time to explain their thinking and reasoning has helped them to clarify and articulate their understanding.

Another change has been to find creative ways to help students use resources available at home to develop understanding. We are always asking ourselves what everyday materials our students can access easily at home for math, science, PE, and other subjects.

Student voice and choice is a priority in lesson planning. We build in time for one-to-one chats with students every week, which has led to the development of positive relationships and also deeper knowledge about the individual child. This, in turn, has provided us with information about student interests and passions.

—Sneh Wadhwaney, Cross Phase Leader, The British School Delhi, New Delhi, India

Modelling Skills
As a remote English language arts teacher, I needed to strategically plan during the pandemic. Not only did I need to focus on the content, but I also needed to examine my technological practices. I created exemplar models that would support my 4th graders as writers.

For example, I asked students to write a paragraph about how they overcame a challenge with the help of someone else. I gave them the following model:

Paragraph one: Introduction
■ 1st and 2nd sentences: Hook—gets the reader excited
■ 3rd sentence: Support from who—family, classmates, or friends
■ 4th sentence: Example of support reason #1
■ 5th sentence: Example of support reason #2
My model:
Do you know what my hardest challenge was? I will never forget the endless hours to complete and defend my dissertation. I couldn't have done it without my wonderful parents. They gave me helpful advice. My parents made me not want to quit.

I used this type of concrete model to help my students to become confident, engaged, and proficient writers.

—Todd Feltman, educator, Hunter College, New York City