Fact Sheet #4 - Performance Standard 2: Instructional Planning

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING

The teacher plans using state and local school district curricula and standards, effective strategies, resources, and data to address the differentiated needs of all students.

In general terms, planning means the "act or process of making or carrying out plans."[1] Instructional planning is a process of the teacher using appropriate curricula, instructional strategies, resources and data during the planning process to address the diverse needs of students. A teacher's teaching begins before he or she steps into the classroom. Prior to each lesson, unit, semester, or school year, teachers plan the content of instruction, select teaching materials, design learning activities and grouping methods, decide on the pacing and allocation of instructional time, and identify learning opportunities for students. Teachers use state or district curriculum standards, school district curriculum goals and objectives, and learning outcomes developed by professional organizations to plot the scope and sequence of subject topics. Teachers also apply their knowledge of research-based practices to plan strategies and techniques for delivering instruction. The most informative source for all of the instructional planning is the student.

Effective teachers also evaluate the quality of available resources when designing a unit or lesson. They use criteria such as appropriateness for grade level, alignment to national, state, or local standards, accuracy of information, the time allowed for the lesson or unit, and the learning benefits that come from using the resource.[2]Effective teachers maximize the instructional benefits of resources while minimizing time allocated to less relevant or unnecessary material.

Research indicates the following key questions that teachers need to consider for effective instructional planning:

1) What should be taught?
2) How should it be taught?
3) How should instruction and student learning be assessed?

What should be taught? Effective student learning requires a progressive and coherent set of learning standards. Effective teachers excel in delineating the intended outcomes of each lesson and describing the behaviors or actions that students should be able to perform after participating in the learning activities. Effective teachers conceive a lesson along two dimensions simultaneously:

1) The teacher's own actions, thoughts, and habits.
2) The students' thinking and understanding of the content.

Thus, effective teachers not only plan what to teach, but more importantly, they plan for whom they are going to teach. They exert effort to reach beyond their comfort zone of disciplinary thinking and actions to incorporate their students' learning preferences.

How Should It Be Taught? Once the learning objectives are developed, evidence suggests that expert teachers are more competent in translating their instructional plans into actions than non-expert teachers.[3] Additionally, effective teachers follow the predefined plan while remaining open to changes and continuously adjusting their instruction based on student needs. Further, expert teachers anticipate the difficulties students might encounter while learning the content of the lesson. They consider students' thinking in order to assess the success of the lesson plan and then modify their instruction promptly.[4] Having a lesson plan cannot ensure that the actual lesson will be implemented as prescribed. The

classroom is full of ebbs and flows. Consequently, teachers need to be opportunistic and tap into their pedagogical and content resources in a fluid and flexible manner in order to proceed smoothly.[5]

How Should Instruction and Student Learning Be Assessed? When the learning objectives are set up, in addition to aligning activities to them, teachers also need to link the assessment plan to the learning objectives. Alignment of curriculum, learning activities, and assessment is integral to any quality instructional design. This type of alignment is referred to as "Opportunity to Learn." Before the actual instruction starts, teachers need to decide upon valid and reliable assessment techniques that elicit student learning data and judge the success of the instructional plan. Additionally, teachers should communicate to their students what they are expected to achieve and inform them how they will be assessed after participating in the learning activities.

Teachers must consider a variety of factors when planning instruction, including how to pace the actual delivery in the classroom. The feasibility of a particular lesson largely depends on student ability and variation, content goals and mandated objectives, time and material resources, and so forth. Many of these factors present teachers with constraints that are beyond their immediate control. For example, there is a prescribed, fixed amount of time each day in which formal instruction may occur. Typically, hours of the day are chunked into units that are dedicated to the study of a certain subject or discipline as determined by a legislative body, school board, or a school administrator. Within those chunks of time, however, teachers traditionally have enjoyed a great deal of flexibility and autonomy. That is, what they did with class time was largely up to them. Over the past decade that flexibility has begun to wane – a by-product of high-stakes testing. Teachers report a narrowing of the curriculum that focuses on tested items and breadth of content while sacrificing depth.[6]

Many school districts require teachers to follow strict pacing guides, which prescribe how much time to spend on certain lessons or concepts. Pacing guides are intended to be instruments that teachers use to measure the amount of instructional time devoted to certain topics in light of the total content that must be taught. Properly used, pacing guides are tools to steer daily instructional decisions within the context of the entire curriculum. Used improperly, however, pacing guides unduly restrict the proper ebb and flow of the classroom and restrict the instructional pace regardless of student ability. On this topic, one researcher stated:

Pacing guides are not an inherently bad idea. Their effects depend on their design and how district and school leaders use them. The best pacing guides emphasize curriculum guidance instead of prescriptive pacing. These guides focus on central ideas and provide links to exemplary curriculum material, lessons, and instructional strategies.[7]

Thus, pacing is an important component of instructional planning. It allows teachers to see the curriculum in its entirety and avoid the trap of overemphasizing one area of content at the expense of others. Because instructional time with students is fixed, teachers must value class time.

In the process of classroom instruction, a teacher needs to make decisions regarding how to pace learning activities and how to allocate instructional time on a regular basis. Anderson, Evertson, and Brophy concluded that "at some point during the lesson, the teacher must make a fundamental decision about whether the group as a whole can or cannot meet the objectives of a lesson."[8] When should a teacher decide to move on to the next goals? Should the teacher wait until every single student in the class masters the

new content or skill? Should the teacher steer the class to new directions as long as half of the class attained the learning goal?

Ideally, students are sensitive to the difficulty of the content and objectives to be learned and will allocate their study time accordingly – they will devote more time to more difficult learning. However, Perrin, Banks and Dargue found that students' control of pace is not perfect and they do not always increase study sufficiently for more difficult learning objectives.[9] An optimum learning approach is to create adaptive learning strategies that diagnose student learning needs on specific learning areas, develop learning activities that conform to the evolving skill level of the student, and adjust time/pace on a content area according to student performance. This purposeful way of scheduling and rescheduling the learning progress, with flexible incorporation of additional practice and review, can significantly increase the study time allocated to challenging content areas and increase student learning outcomes.

One important misconception that many teachers hold about learning is to perceive it as a mechanical process of information being transferred from textbooks to students who acquire it through listening, reading, and memorization.[10] However, in reality, the way learners interact with new information is influenced by their experiences and prior knowledge and beliefs, and they often fail to remember, understand, and apply new information that has no connection to them and no context for acquiring meaning.[11] Materials and equipment serve as a supportive rather than a central role in the curriculum and instruction.[12] That is, the school district's core curricula and the teachers' instructional strategies should not be dictated by textbooks. On one hand, materials aligned with curriculum and instruction is indispensable for each student's academic success. Effective teaching is much more than the acting out of scripts written by the publishers of textbooks and tests.[13] Students are frequently conditioned in their approach to learning by experience in teacher-centered, textbook-driven classrooms. Hill stated:

Traditional textbooks are fact- rather than process-oriented. They stress "what" instead of "how" and "why"…when teachers allow textbooks to dominate instruction they are unlikely to meet today's educational demands for critical thinking, problem-solving, skill-building, and inquiry about the real world.[14]

In addition, some topics are too specific to be included in textbooks and some are too new to be included in textbooks. To enrich students' learning, teachers need to be well-informed and resourceful investigators and expect their students to cultivate the same qualities.[15] Furthermore, to prepare students for the world outside the school, teachers need to "develop ways for them to learn from information as they will encounter in the real-life situations, information that is not predigested, carefully selected, or logically organized."[16]

Planning is preparation for action. Without prior thought and planning, ongoing review, and adjustment as the plan unfolds in practice, and reflection on what worked, what didn't, and how to improve, teachers seldom improve practice. Indeed, planning is an essential tool for effective teaching. Teaching is a complex activity that involves careful preparation and planning, both for short-term learning purposes and for long-term learning purposes. Misulis commented that "regardless of the teaching model and methods used, effective instruction begins with careful, thorough, and organized planning on the part of the teacher."[17]

Comparatively, novice teachers have more difficulty responding to individual student needs in their planning. They tend to develop a "one-size fits all" approach to planning, whereas more experienced teachers build in differentiation and

contingencies at different points during the lesson.[18] To further assist with meeting individual needs, effective teachers typically plan a blend of whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction.

As an illustration, Haynie examined the planning practices of ten effective and ten less effective teachers whose effectiveness was identified by their students' achievement gains. He found that most top teachers collaborated with one or more teachers while planning lessons; however, the less effective teachers reported they always planned lessons alone. The top teachers also were not restricted by pacing guides, and reached beyond prepared resources to plan their own activities, while the less effective teachers used resources already prepared. In addition, the top teachers used student assessment data in the planning of instruction. Based on data drawn from frequent assessments, they made data-driven decisions about what goals and objectives to address.[19]

Allington and Johnston also found that the instruction of effective teachers was multi-sourced.[20] Exemplary teachers were inclined to stretch the reading and writing beyond the textbooks. Although effective teachers did often dip into prescribed textbooks, they hardly ever followed traditional plans for these materials. For instance, while planning for a lesson in social science, the effective teachers usually used historical fiction, biography, information on the Internet and in magazines, and other nontraditional content sources. Borko and Livingston investigated the pedagogical expertise in instructional planning by comparing novice teachers and experienced teachers.[21] They found that novices showed more time-consuming, less efficient planning. While implementing the planned lessons, their attempts to be responsive to students were likely to lead them away from scripted lesson plans. The novice teachers were less successful in translating their instructional plans into actions than expert teachers. The expert teachers were better able to predict where in a course the students were likely to have problems and predict misconceptions the students would have and areas of learning these misconceptions were likely to affect.

Various research studies have found that effective teachers tend to have the following behaviors while making planning decisions:

- Construct a blueprint of how to address the curriculum during the instructional time.[22]
- Collaborate with one or more teachers while planning, rather than plan lessons alone.[23]
- Facilitate planning units in advance to make intra- and interdisciplinary connections.[24]
- Use student assessment data to plan what goals and objectives to address.[25]
- Plan for the context of the lesson to help students relate, organize, and make knowledge become a part of students' long-term memory.[26]
- Sequence material to promote students' cognitive and developmental growth.[27]
- Use knowledge of available resources to determine what resources they need to acquire or develop.[28]
- Plan instruction in a multi-sourced manner.[29]
- Take into account the abilities of their students and the students' strengths and weaknesses as well as their interest level.[30]

Sample Performance Indicators for the Professional Knowledge of Teachers

- Analyzes and uses student learning data to inform planning.
- Develops plans that are clear, logical, sequential, and integrated across the curriculum (e.g., long-term goals, lesson plans, and syllabi).
- Plans instruction effectively for content mastery, pacing, and transitions.
- Plans for instruction to meet the needs of all students.

- Aligns and connects lesson objectives to state and local school district curricula and standards, and student learning needs.
- Develops appropriate course, unit, and daily plans, and is able to adapt plans when needed.

Sample Student Evidence that Teacher met the Criteria for Proficiency

- See a logical sequence and purpose for most instruction and activities.
- Describe a variety of activities the teacher uses to engage students in meeting specific standards.
- Learn from assessment tasks that clearly measure progress and mastery of standards.
- Engage in learning activities that lead to achieving and exceeding standards.
- Understand teacher's reasons behind activities, organization of learning, and assessments.
- Understand the connections between CCGPS/GPS and classroom assessments.
- Experience assessments using format, language, and content aligned with district, state, and national mandated tests.
- Demonstrate the use of higher-order thinking skills on assessments.

Sample Conference Prompts

- What process or rationale do you use in selecting standards for lessons or units?
- How do you engage students in planning, learning, and assessing their learning?
- How do you plan for assessment of student progress and mastery of standards?
- In what ways have you worked with colleagues toward deeper assessments and use of assessment data to plan?
- How do you build high-quality, demanding assessments?
- How do you plan for the different needs of your students?

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Georgia Department of Education
Teacher Keys Effectiveness System

Teacher Self-Assessment Checklist

Performance Standard 2: Instructional Planning

Quality		Level IV	Level III	Level II	Level I
Learning Objectives	Set clear, specific, and unambiguous learning objectives to communicate intended learning outcomes.				
	Identify learning objectives that focus on high cognitive levels of student learning (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creation).				
	Use learning objective to design instructional strategies and organize learning activities.				
	Encourage students to objectively evaluate their progress against the benchmark.				
Differentiated Planning	Use student assessment and diagnostic data in instructional planning.				
	Plan a learner-centered environment that allows for student choice, flexibility, and independence.				
	Use a variety of grouping arrangements and ensure high mobility within the classroom.				
	Plan advanced learning (e.g., enrichment, curriculum compacting) for gifted learners.				
	Plan remediated learning for struggling students.				
Alignment with Curriculum	Construct a blueprint of how to address the curriculum during the instructional time at the beginning of the school year or semester.				
	Plan appropriate long-range learning and developmental goals for students.				
	Align daily lesson plans with district curriculum guides.				
	Sequencing learning materials and activities logically and develop appropriate timelines for the completion of instructional units of study.				
	Identify and develop assessment strategies to determine the extent that intended learning has occurred.				
Resources and Materials	Integrate other content areas when appropriate.				
	Use materials from a wide variety of resources for lesson planning.				
	Determine available technology resources and integrate technology into instruction when it is value-added.				
	Evaluate the quality of available resources when designing a unit or lesson.				
Team Planning	Collaborate with other teachers to make intra- and inter-disciplinary connections.				