

Stage 3 Plan learning experiences and instruction

Planning learning experiences and instruction involves **six** aspects:

- Check students' prior knowledge, skill levels and potential misconceptions
- Identify a series of specific learning intentions/goals
- Organise and sequence the Specific learning intentions/goals
- Use W.H.E.R.E.T.O to inform learning events/experiences
- Code learning events/experiences
- Decide how progress will be monitored during learning events. How will students get feedback?

1. Check students' prior knowledge, skill levels and potential misconceptions

This information will guide any differentiated instruction/assessment that may be needed. Pre-assessments should NOT be graded. To check prior learning, the following can be used.

Know, Want to know, Learnings (K-W-L)

Prior to the introduction of a new topic or skill, ask students what they already **Know** (or think they know) about the topic or skill. These could be recorded on a whiteboard or chart paper under the “K” column. (Sometimes, students make statements that are incorrect or reveal misconceptions.)

Secondly, ask them what they **Want** to know (or what questions they have) about the topic/skill. These are recorded under the “W” column. (Their questions often reveal interests or “hooks” to the topic. In some cases, their questions reveal misconceptions that will need to be addressed.)

As the lesson or unit proceeds, **Learnings** are summarized and recorded in the “L” column as they occur. (This provides an opportunity to go back and correct any misconceptions that may have been initially recorded in the “K” column.)

Pre-Test

Give students a pre-test to check their prior knowledge of key facts and concepts. Use the results to plan instruction and selection of resources. (Make sure that students know that the results will not count toward final grades.)

Skills Check

Have students demonstrate their proficiency with a targeted skill or process. It is helpful to have a proficiency checklist or developmental rubric to use in assessing the degree of skill competence. Students can then use the checklist or rubric for on-going self-assessment.

Web/Concept Map

Ask students to create a web or concept map to show the elements or components of a topic or process. This technique is especially effective in revealing whether students have gaps in their knowledge and the extent to which they understand relationships among the elements.

Misconception Check

Present students with common errors or predictable misconceptions regarding a designated topic, concept, skill or process. See if they are able to identify the error or misconception and explain why it is erroneous or flawed. The misconception check can also be presented in the form of a true-false quiz, where students must agree or disagree with statements or examples.

2. Identify a series of specific learning intentions/goals

Consider learning intentions/goals (Acquisition, Meaning, Transfer) and break them down into of specific learning intentions (these could be for a week, a few days or a lesson).

Share and discuss these with students and display prominently.

3. Organise and sequence the specific learning intentions/goals

Organise the specific learning intentions/goals into a sequence and decide on learning events/experiences.

Consider the sequence of learning intentions that best suits the desired results.

Decide on the learning events/experiences that are most appropriate for the desired results.

How will you support students to understand important ideas and processes?

How will you prepare them to autonomously transfer their learning?

What enabling knowledge and skills will students need in order to perform effectively and achieve desired results?

Which activities, sequence, and resources are best suited to accomplish the learning intentions/goals?

4. Use W.H.E.R.E.T.O to inform learning events/experiences

W = Where and Why

Where are the students coming from? Where are they headed? How will I help learners know what they will be learning? Why is this worth learning? What evidence will show their learning? How will their performance be evaluated?

Learners of all ages are more likely to put forth effort and meet with success when they understand the learning goals and see them as meaningful and personally relevant. The “W” in W.H.E.R.E.T.O. reminds teachers to clearly communicate the goals and help students see their relevance. In addition, learners need to know the performance expectations and assessments through which they will demonstrate their learning so that they have clear learning targets and the basis for monitoring their progress toward them.

H = Hook and Hold

How will I hook and engage the learners? How will I keep them engaged?

The best teachers have always recognised the value of “hooking” learners through introductory activities that tease the mind and engage the heart in the learning process. Teachers are encouraged to deliberately plan ways of hooking their learners to the topics they teach. Examples of effective hooks include provocative essential questions, counter-intuitive phenomena, controversial issues, authentic problems and challenges, emotional encounters, and humour. One must be mindful, of course, of not just coming up with interesting introductory activities that have no carry-over value. The intent is to match the hook with the content and the experiences of the learners—by design—as a means of drawing them into a productive learning experience.

E = Explore and Experience, Enable and Equip

How will I equip students to master identified standards and succeed with the transfer performances? What learning experiences will help develop and deepen understanding of important ideas?

Understanding cannot be simply transferred like a load of freight from one mind to another. Coming to understand requires active intellectual engagement on the part of the learner. Therefore, instead of merely covering the content, effective educators “uncover” the most enduring ideas and processes in ways that engage students in constructing meaning for themselves. To this end, teachers select an appropriate balance of constructivist learning experiences, structured activities, and direct instruction for helping students acquire the desired knowledge, skill, and understanding. While there is certainly a place for direct instruction and modeling, teaching for understanding asks teachers to also adopt a facilitative role; i.e., to engage learners in making meaning through active inquiry and diverse experience with the content.

R = Reflect, Rethink, Revise

How will I encourage the learners to rethink previous learning? How will I encourage on-going revision and refinement?

Few learners develop a complete understanding of abstract ideas on the first encounter. Indeed, the phrase “coming to understand” is suggestive of a process. Over time, learners develop and deepen their understanding by thinking and re-thinking, by examining ideas from different points of view, from examining underlying assumptions, and by receiving feedback and revising. Just as the quality of a piece of writing benefits from the iterative process of drafting and revising, so to do understandings become more mature. The “R” in W.H.E.R.E.T.O. encourages teachers to explicitly include such opportunities.

E = Evaluate Work and Progress

How will I promote students’ self-evaluation and reflection?

Capable and independent learners are distinguished by their capacity to set goals, self-assess their progress, and adjust as needed. Yet one of the most frequently overlooked aspects of the instructional process involves helping students to develop the meta-cognitive skills of self-evaluation, self-regulation, and reflection. The second “E” of WHERETO reminds teachers to build in time and expectations for students to regularly self assess, reflect on the meaning of their learning, and set goals for future performance.

T = Tailor and Personalise the Work

How will I tailor the learning experiences to the nature of the learners I serve? How might I differentiate instruction to respond to the varied needs of students?

“One size fits all” teaching is rarely optimal. Learners differ significantly in terms of prior knowledge, skill levels, interests, talents, and preferred ways of learning. Accordingly, the most effective teachers get to know their students and tailor their teaching and learning experiences so as to connect the material with the kids. A variety of strategies may be employed to differentiate content (how subject matter is presented), process (how students work), and product (how learners demonstrate their learning). The logic of backward design offers a cautionary note here: the content standards and understandings should not be differentiated (except for students with Individual Education Plans). In other words, we differentiate means while keeping the ends in mind for all.

O = Organise for Optimal Effectiveness

How will I organise the learning experiences for maximum engagement and effectiveness? What sequence will be optimal given the understanding and transfer goals?

When the primary educational goals involve helping students acquire basic knowledge and skills, teachers may be comfortable “covering” the content by telling and modelling. However, when we include understanding and transfer as desired results, educators are encouraged to give careful attention to how the content is organized and sequenced. Just as effective story tellers and filmmakers often don’t begin in the “beginning,” teachers can consider alternatives to sequential content coverage. For example, methods such as the Case Method, Problem or Project-Based Learning, and Socratic Seminars immerse students in challenging situations, even before they may have acquired all of the basics. They actively engage students in trying to make meaning and apply their learning in demanding circumstances without single “correct” answers. It is through such attempts to apply learning in context that one develops expertise and strategic skill.

Source: (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011).

5. Code learning events/experiences

Code learning experiences to ensure all three types of goals (Acquisition, Meaning, Transfer) are addressed in the plan.

Beside each learning event/experience record A T or M (or a combination) to check that all three areas are being covered in the learning plan.

6. Decide how progress will be monitored during learning events. How will students get feedback?

The following on-going assessment techniques can be used to obtain a quick “pulse check” of a whole class or group of students.

Hand Signals

Ask students to display a designated hand signal to indicate their understanding of a designated concept, principle, or process. For example,

1. I understand _____ and can explain it (e.g., thumbs up)
2. I do not yet understand _____. (e.g., thumbs down)
3. I’m not completely sure about _____. (e.g., wave hand)

Mini white boards

Have students record a response on a mini white board and hold it up. For example,

Prediction – *What number should appear next in the sequence?*

Agree/Disagree – *Is this an example of adaptation?*

Student Response Systems

Use SRS “clickers” to have students record a response to a question or a prompt. The results can be tabulated on the teacher’s computer to provide immediate feedback.

Misconception Check

Present students with common or predictable misconceptions about a designated concept, principle, or process. Ask them to agree or disagree. Student can respond using hand signals, white boards, SRSs, or on paper.

“Quick Writes” and Exit Cards (“Ticket to Leave”)

Periodically, distribute index cards or slips of paper and ask students to complete the cards. Here are sample prompts:

What are the most important things you learned about ____?

What do you understand about _____?

What don’t you understand yet? What questions do you have?

Quick Writes can be used at the beginning of a class. Exit cards are typically completed at the conclusion of a class period or the end of the week, etc.

Scan the responses, looking for patterns (e.g., when students have the same questions).

Observations

Carefully observe students as they work or respond to questions. Observe the work they produce. What areas of strength and weakness do you notice?

For ideas for Ongoing assessment for individuals refer to (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011).

References

McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2011). *Designing an understanding-based curriculum around common core standards*. Retrieved June 1, 2014, from <http://historymaiden.wikispaces.com/file/view/McTighe+handout+11.14.11.pdf>