

Guiding Questions

How to Build a Unit of Study

Office of the Deputy Superintendent
Department of Literacy and Professional Development
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Introduction

A primary goal of the Woonsocket Education Department's professional development initiative is to improve teaching and learning for all students. We believe that the most direct way to achieve this goal is to help teachers improve the way they plan for and deliver differentiated instruction, incorporate and facilitate ongoing and varied authentic assessment of student progress, and create a classroom climate that encourages rich and rigorous discussions of and reflection upon standard-setting student work. Exemplary lesson planning and design actualizes the Principles of Learning (University of Pittsburgh, 2000).

The Unit of Study Lesson Design adheres to the Principles of Learning (University of Pittsburgh, 2000), following the University of Pittsburgh model for lesson design ("Didactic Reflection in Lesson Design and Analysis" – University of Pittsburgh, 2000). This model asks teachers to consider and implement the following conceptual framework:

- The lesson and the student, "**Who**", are central to the instructional process.
- The teacher must understand "**What**" standards are being addressed.
- The teacher must understand that "**How**" a teacher instructs through teaching models, strategies, and methods must be aligned to the targeted standards.
- The teacher must understand that "**What**" and "**How**" together form the curriculum.
- The teacher must understand that "**Why**" this lesson is being implemented must be grounded in the teacher's comprehensive knowledge of learners, theories of learning and teaching, educational philosophy and the over arching template provided by The Principles of Learning.

Guiding Questions

Woonsocket Education Department Unit of Study Design Template

Teacher:	School:	Grade Level:
Instructional area:	Unit of Study:	Duration:

What content areas will be covered in this Unit of Study?

This question is particularly important for teachers who have planned an integrated, thematic unit.

How long will the unit last in duration?

Start and end dates are important. While we cannot always pin a unit down to an exact finish date, an estimated time of closure is important. Students need to know when final work is to be submitted. Some units may cover a week's time. Some may cover a month. Some may cover a quarter or a semester. Some may even be yearlong units. Elementary teachers, in particular, may have several units going at once, in order to present all content areas, which may be of varying duration.

Why: Knowledge Base of Student Learners

Instructional Groups

Group:	Group:	Group:	Group:

It is important to design instruction to the needs of students. What do your students know? What can they do? Which students are still struggling with a concept or skill, and which will need to be further challenged? How do you know which students need help? What kinds of pre-assessments have the students completed? On what information are you basing your instructional groups?

Why: Theoretical Foundation

What prior knowledge do the students need in order to have a successful experience with this unit?

What skills do you assume the students have?

What learning strategies do you assume the students have?

What vocabulary do you assume the students bring into the unit?

What information do you expect your students to carry into this unit?
What experiences do you assume the students bring into this unit? The word “assume” is very important here. We sometimes assume knowledge, skills, vocabulary, learning strategies on the part of our students because of our own backgrounds. Our students may not have had experiences with the same activities. It is especially important to consider this when teaching diverse cultures. For some students, this may be their first experience with school. For others, the learning strategies that have served them to date may be very different from your expectations.

With which of your teaching strategies do you assume the students are familiar?

We all have different styles of teaching. Particularly at the beginning of a school year, you will want to think about your personal style. Do you allow students to move about the room? When? What are the parameters? What is your personal noise level threshold? How do you get students' attention? Is cooperative learning an important part of your classroom's activities? Do you use lots of visuals? Again, this is especially important to take into consideration when working with students of diverse cultures. Many teaching styles common in classrooms in the United States are not practiced in other countries.

What: Standards/GLEs - GSEs to be addressed

Which of the CREST frameworks will this unit address? Which of the GLE's will be addressed? Will you find it helpful to utilize the NCEE Standards books?

What: Knowledge and Skills/Key Concepts

What concepts and vocabulary do you plan to cover?

For each specific instructional activity, you will need to plan and share with the students what concepts you expect them to take with them and what vocabulary they will need in order to understand the concepts. Again, when working with students from diverse cultures, it is of utmost importance to share up-front the vocabulary with which you will be working.

What: Essential Questions

Essential questions are questions that will guide and drive the instruction. These are questions that will help the teacher design instruction and help students follow the instruction. Essential questions will have an answer at the end of the unit. Essential questions are not questions that can be answered with a one-word answer. Rather, they are questions that should pique a student's interest.

In designing essential questions, it is important to ask yourself - What do you want to accomplish with this unit?

Knowledge – What is it that you, as a teacher, hope to gain from this unit? What information about your students – as a whole and as individuals – are you hoping to ascertain?

Final product – How does this unit fit into your yearlong goals for this particular group of students? What is the ultimate purpose of the culminating assessment?

What do you want your students to accomplish with this unit?

Knowledge – What specific information do you want students to take with them from this unit?

Skills – What specific skills, learning strategies, and abilities do you want students to have gained from participation in this unit?

How: Evidence of Learning/Demonstration – Assessment Tools

What assessment strategies are you planning to utilize?

Assessment strategies are also important to plan ahead. Again, we need to be flexible enough to “think on our feet”, however, students need to have an idea of how the teacher will assess and evaluate their work.

Student Work Products and Assignments

Culminating Assessment:

What will the design of your culminating assessment be?

Each unit should have a culminating assessment – a final product that will tell the teacher and students if expectations have been met. The culminating assessment can be one product, or perhaps a collection of products from throughout the unit. It is an individual teacher's prerogative. Students need to know what the culminating

assessment will consist of up front. We cannot expect students to perform at high levels if we don't let them know how that performance will be assessed.

Progress monitoring:

How many specific instructional activities will you include in this unit?

Throughout a unit of study, it is important to assess individual student progress to monitor for understanding of concepts and acquisition of skills. The length of the unit, the design of the activity, and your school calendar will govern the number and design.

How will you assess your progress?

How will you know that you are accomplishing what you set out to accomplish?

How: Learning Tasks/Activities

Activity #____

GLEs/GSEs specific to the lesson

Which of the GLEs/GSEs identified for this unit of study will this particular lesson target? Is there a specific indicator within the GLE that you plan to work on with your students.

Context: (Data, Reason for the lesson, Duration, Supporting information)

What information about your students' learning are you expecting this lesson to provide you? How does this lesson fit into the design of this unit of study? How long do you expect this lesson to last? As with the unit as

a whole, it is important that students understand time limits. When do you expect products for this activity to be turned in to you?

Differentiation (Opportunities to learn)

Have you provided equal access to learning from this lesson for all your students? Do you have learning opportunities that will allow students to use multiple intelligences (e.g. auditory learners, visual learners)? Have you thought about accommodations and modifications for students with learning or language challenges? How rigorous is the task/activity? Have you considered the *Depth of Knowledge* to which you want students to work in this activity and the corresponding assessment?

Objectives of the lesson:

What exactly do you wish students to know and be able to do after engaging in this lesson? Is the objective measurable?

Assessment design

For each learning task it is important to assess individual student understanding of concepts and acquisition of skills. It is critical to provide specific, constructive, and timely feedback to students. For this specific activity, how will you determine if the students learned what you were teaching in this specific lesson? What assessment strategies will you use? Do the assessments align with your objectives?

Instructional Procedures:

Obviously we don't write down each of our strategies because we need to be flexible to the daily, ongoing, and individual needs of our students as they present themselves in the moment. However, there may be certain strategies you'd like to try or you know have been effective teaching tools for you in the past. It is important to make note of these.

Crafting the design of the instruction is critical. It is important to plan out the design of the talk format (e.g. teacher-led whole group instruction, student-led small group talk, fishbowl) for each part of the instructional workshop (opening/community meeting, student engagement and collaboration, closure/community meeting/share). The plan must include the specifics of what the students will be doing during each part of the workshop, as well as what the teacher will be doing to support the student learning. Basically, what will you do? What will you have students do? What is the plan of action for the day?

Using the workshop as your guide:

How will you introduce this specific learning task/activity? How will you activate the students' prior knowledge and connect it to this learning? How do you motivate students' interests? What talk format will you use for the opening? What will the students be expected to do during the opening? What will you be doing during the opening? What teaching strategies are you planning to utilize?

How will you design and implement an effective time for student engagement and collaboration? Again, what talk format will you use to ensure that students engage with the learning? What questions will you pose to encourage students to take risks with their learning? What questions will you ask to help students deepen their understanding? How will you facilitate student discourse? What specific activities will the students pursue? What will you be doing during the engagement? How can you best facilitate student learning? What teaching strategies are you planning to utilize? How do you plan to monitor students' learning throughout the lesson?

How will you bring the learning task/activity to a close? How will the talk format for this component be designed? What will students be expected to share or do? What will you do to facilitate student learning? Which key points of the lesson will you highlight? What questions do you plan to ask to ensure meaningful student feedback?

How: Support

Instructional resources, materials, equipment

What materials will the students need over the course of the unit? What materials will you need in order to successfully implement this unit?

It is important to plan ahead, as materials are not always available when we want or need them. Are you planning to use notebooks? Do you need poster boards? Do the students need paint, scissors, and colored pencils? What books or supplemental texts and/or materials will you need for the successful completion of this unit of study?

What centers – if any- will you have accessible to the students? How will students use them?

What wall decorations will enhance the learning environment?
How will the print and artwork around the room assist the students in reaching the final outcomes for this unit of study? What will your bulleting boards cover? How will they be integrated into the design of the unit? Will you use charts? How long will they stay up? Will they be visuals only, or will they be utilized by students on a daily basis?

Physical classroom design

The physical design of the classroom must enhance the learning without overpowering students. How will your desks be arranged? Where will other tables be placed? Will desks or chairs have to be moved during the learning task/activity? Will students have to be able to move during the learning task/activity?

Where will your classroom library be placed? What books do you need for your classroom library? How will the students utilize the classroom library for this unit?

Where will your centers be located? What kinds of print support will you include?