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Unit Plans

By William A. Owings, Ed.D. and Michael W. Bedwell

Careful unit planning as a framework for daily lesson plans can help teachers individualize instruction, manage time and classroom behavior, bring cohesiveness to a series of related daily lessons, and ultimately improve student achievement. Principals can help teachers by providing clear expectations and a consistent framework for unit planning. School and district philosophy will help determine the particular model chosen from the wide variety available. Following is one format.

Objectives

Teachers should list all terminal student learning objectives, labeling them as facts, concepts, or skills. Every effort should be made to include unit and daily objectives that involve students in the higher levels of thinking. When the unit has two or more related objectives, they should be sequenced from simple to complex.

Materials

Once the objectives have been outlined, the teachers should gather a variety of materials of different reading and difficulty levels that encompass a diversity of student interest. Students should be encouraged to investigate and find appropriate supplemental materials on their own. These may include the following:

- textbooks
- magazine articles
- filmstrips
- videotapes
- recordings
- poems
- plays
- novels

Vocabulary

Teachers should list terms critical to accomplishing the identified objectives and vocabulary from the text and other

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materials crucial to understanding. A sequence and plan for introducing and teaching this vocabulary is then developed.

Prerequisites

Teachers should assess student understanding of the concepts, procedures, and information needed to master each objective. Methods of assessment may include the following:

- reviewing standardized test scores
- checking instructional reading levels
- conferring with other teachers
- giving a pretest
- reviewing student work from previous units

Correctives and teaching of prerequisites should be provided prior to implementing the daily lessons.

Summative Evaluation

Throughout the unit, teachers should periodically check for understanding of the formative objectives contained in each daily lesson plan. The final or summative measure of the unit objectives should be developed before any instruction begins. This will ensure that tests or other instruments are aligned with what is taught. The summative test should cover low to high cognitive levels and should not be given until students have demonstrated understanding and ability to achieve the objectives. Summative evaluations may include the following:

- teacher-made or standardized tests
- projects and reports
- class presentations and demonstrations
- research papers

Correctives

Based on the formative assessments, teachers will need to provide alternate illustrations, examples, and modes of instruction for students who demonstrate a need for more time or instruction. These correctives may include the following:

- peer tutoring
- small group instruction
- alternative study materials

Enrichment

When students have mastered the objectives being taught, they should be given opportunities to explore collateral

topics, engage in investigations, and pursue other related high level experiences. These activities are essential for managing the classroom environment when correctives are being provided to other students. Enrichment activities may include the following, done individually or in groups:

- writing plays, stories, or computer programs
- producing films, displays, art works
- participating in games, debates, and simulations.

Closure

At the completion of each unit, separate from the summative evaluation, teachers should provide an opportunity for students to focus on the key learning elements and make a transition to the next unit. Examples of closure activities follow:

- playing review games
- summarizing in writing or orally what was learned
- making review questions to ask the class
- forecasting the next unit of study
- anticipating practical application of the knowledge and skills gained.

Summary

Careful, long-range unit planning can bring structure and cohesiveness to a related series of daily lessons. In addition, such planning can assure student success by providing for individualized instruction and enrichment. In the long run, unit planning can save the teacher valuable planning time by having already prepared contingency plans ready when difficulties arise. Successful unit plans can be saved from year to year and modified in the particulars to help ensure student success.

RESOURCES

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