Core Function	Curriculum, Assessment, and Instructional Planning

Effective Practice	Engage Instructional Teams in developing standards-aligned units of instruction

Indicator: Units of instruction include specific learning activities aligned to objectives. (5104)

Explanation: The unit of instruction, developed by a teacher Instructional Team, outlines the curriculum for the unit and includes standards-aligned objectives. For each objective, the Instructional Team develops several, differentiated learning activities that can be assigned to students based on their pre-test results and their progress during the unit. The learning activities can be for Independent work, group work, computer-based instruction, and homework. The learning activities can be differentiated for lagging students, students on track, and early learners who need enhanced assignments.

Questions: Do the units of instruction developed by your Instructional Teams include a variety of differentiated learning activities for each of the unit's objectives? Do teachers use these activities to differentiate assignments for students based on their demonstrated mastery of the objectives?

Learning activities, the assignments given to each student targeted to that student's level of mastery, should be carefully aligned with the objectives included in the unit plan to provide a variety of ways for a student to achieve mastery as evidenced in *both* the successful completion of the learning activities and correct responses on the unit post-test. An Instructional Team's unit plans include a description of each leveled and differentiated learning activity, the standards-based objectives associated with it, and criteria for mastery. These activities become arrows in the teacher's quiver of instructional options for each student. The unit plan aligns the curriculum to standards and benchmarks. The next step is to align the curriculum to instruction. This is where the real fun begins – teachers sharing their most successful instructional strategies for meeting each objective in the unit of instruction. Unit plans level each objective into three tiers – target, enhanced, and prerequisite. The unit plans also differentiate learning activities among various modes of instruction – whole-class instruction, independent work, small-group and center-based activities, and homework. The activity instructions provide the detail that enables any teacher to use the learning activity, and also become a means of explaining the activity to students (Redding, 2007).

Wong & Wong (2011) claim that learning objectives are the heart of every lesson. They say for lessons to come to life in the classroom, they must come from the heart. According to Philadelphia consulting teacher Michelle Shields, learning objectives are the heart of every lesson. They give a purpose to learning. They are the foundations for lesson planning. Objectives provide the criteria for evaluating student achievement. Shields says, "Objectives ensure learning is focused so students have a sense of purpose to learning and know what is expected of them."

To help students develop responsibility to complete their lessons and succeed, John Hattie of the University of Auckland in New Zealand says, "Simply tell students what they will be learning before the lesson begins and you can raise student achievement as much as 27 percent." He also claimed providing students with specific feedback about their progress and one can raise achievement as much as 37 percent (Hattie, 2013).

In the 2013 article "Marzano Strategies for Implementing Best Online Teaching Practices," Robert Marzano listed as one of his Best Practices, "Adding external resources to assignments aligned to local objectives." The strategies include, "Adapt the course content to meet students' needs by providing additional assignments, resources, and activities for remediation or enrichment during the course experience"; "Assure that course content, assignments, and assessments are of appropriate rigor and align to state standards"; and "Augment, as needed, course content, learning activities, and assessments to meet all required standards within a course."

References and Resources

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