

Four-Step Lesson Intervention



When a lesson does not go well, a lack of planning is generally at the root of the problem. Teacher education students are required to write extensive, multipage lesson plans, but yet they admit that once they have their own classrooms, this type of planning is impossible to complete. Due to time constraints, both new and veteran teachers may resort to “survival” or limited planning. To address this issue in your school, after you’ve completed an observation of a teacher in need of help with lessons, consider a simple, four-step method of planning to guide the teacher to effective teaching. The steps of focus, presentation of new material, application, and review are applicable to any grade or subject lesson, no matter the standards, goals, and objectives to be met.

1. Focus

Open the discussion of focus by emphasizing that an effective lesson is framed by the standards. If the standards are not clear to you as an observer, ask, “Which standards framed this lesson and how could you have presented the standards to students understandably?” After discussion of the standards, ask, “What were your goals for this lesson?” and “What were the students supposed to know or be able to do by the end of the lesson?”

To focus students, the teacher needs to plan how students enter the classroom and what they do immediately upon entering the room. Visuals are important, and teachers should write an outline on the board of what

will be done and have a question, a picture, or something on the screen to engage students immediately. The visual focus is a review or preview—something novel and interesting to catch students’ attention. A good focus question or activity also gives the teacher informal feedback on the students’ previous learning. Gone are the days when a teacher could just say, “Good morning, class. Where did we leave off yesterday?” or “Open your books to page 42.”

2. Presentation of New Material

An effective focus leads the teacher into the presentation of new material. Encourage teachers to plan their lessons with action verbs. The teacher

presents, reads, models, demonstrates, and explains. A creative teacher may sing, rap, or present new material by repetition or with movements. Explanations and presentation of new material must be done in short blocks, with high engagement for the students. Variety is the key; sometimes the teacher will provide new material directly, but other times inquiry and discovery learning work well.

A key to effective teaching of new material is visualization. Projecting vocabulary on the screen and creating word walls help students to learn. As an evaluator, look for handouts that have an outline, or fill in the blanks, so that young students are learning how to take notes from the visuals on the board or screen. Verify that a student in the back can see the SMART board or any form of projection used. If a teacher is having difficulty getting students to learn new material, suggest more visuals be used.

3. Application of Material

Application of material includes all types of practice for students, and this step should be fully interspersed with step 2 because we want students to engage quickly with new material. Good examples include paired activities, short discussions, and problem-solving. In this stage of the lesson, students work problems, write something on their own, edit someone else’s writing, or they make something. Think, pair, and share activities allow students time to process information.

Make sure practice is guided by the teacher; students need much feedback and practice. Effective teachers guide practice with frequent feedback, more examples worked together with students, and one-on-one correction when possible.

Application is the active learning part of the lesson. An evaluator should be able to tell if students are answering questions, asking questions, writing answers, and learning. The use of visuals helps tremendously during application. The teacher can model

an answer, write it on the board or screen, and provide visual feedback.

4. Review

Review includes both assessment and closure of a lesson. As an evaluator, ask, “Did the students meet the objectives established for this lesson?” and “How did you know that the objectives were met?” Students need to demonstrate their learning by writing answers or tell the teacher what they learned.

One-minute papers provide the teacher with feedback on student learning. Also called “the ticket out the door,” students are given one or two questions about the material and are asked to write what they know. It can be effective to have students answer the following questions:

1. What is the most important point you learned well today?
2. What point remains unclear to you about today’s lesson?

Obviously, younger students will need very simple questions, and may not be able to assess their own learning as well, but the exit paper idea can still provide valuable feedback to the teacher.

In addition to assessing the students’ learning from the lesson, a teacher can use the end of the lesson to tie the material to the next class. It helps students to hear a little about the next lesson or the next day’s work. In fact, some teachers make the end of the lesson an advertisement for the importance (and fun) of the next day’s lessons. Teacher enthusiasm should show.

Much has been written about the stress today’s teachers are under to raise student achievement. Effective planning, combined with good classroom management, creates an environment for learning. If a teacher is struggling, the principal must intervene, getting the teacher to find a way to see his or her own problems and solutions. Help struggling teachers go back to the basics of planning with these four steps. 

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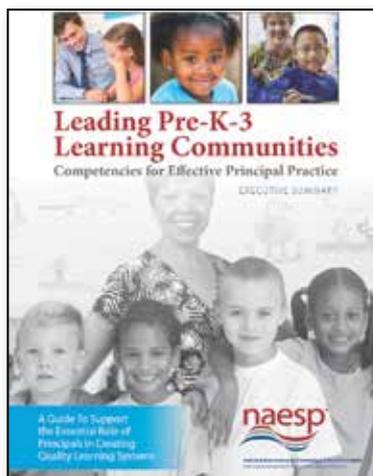


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