Steps and Explanations to Planning Outstanding Units

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The intention of the following guide is to give a condensed version of the process by which teachers can begin to plan units that develop students in their capacity to become independent learners responsible for their learning whilst covering the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the Victorian Curriculum.

The thinking underlying this approach is that, much like a driver cannot learn to drive unless they practice driving in reality (not on Need for Speed or any other virtual world), students cannot become independent, life-long learners unless we create learning that develops the whole student and requires them to practice in reality the skills of being independent, life-long learners.

What this means to teachers is that their planning of units must be "front-ended", in other words, mostly done prior to beginning the unit. Much like you plan your journey (which roads, which turns, what will you pick up or do along the way, etc) if you are driving to a new destination, teachers need to plan the learning journey for the students which they will drive. What teachers need to address as they plan is the following aspects of what leads to powerful learning:

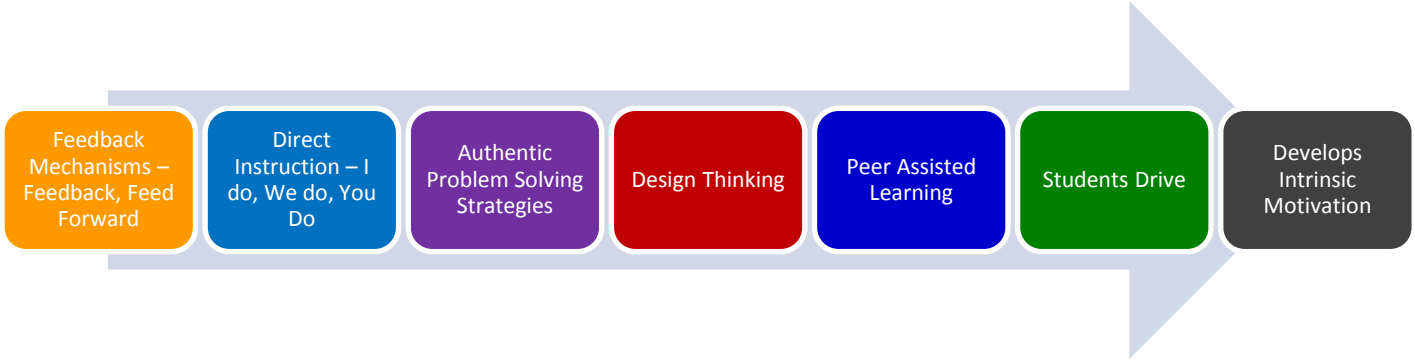
#1: Powerful Learning is built upon rituals and habitual practices

#2: Powerful Learning requires students to drive to the destination we set

#3: Powerful Learning develops a growth mindset as part of the process of learning

#4 Powerful Learning provides choice, responsibility and purpose in the world of the student

These 4 key aspects are covered when teachers include the elements shown in the diagram below.



So HOW do we plan for performance? We plan for performance by addressing WHAT, HOW, WHY and any potential OBSTACLES.

"WHAT" is the destination or goal of the learning? Where do we want the students to go? By the end of the learning journey what are the skills, knowledge and understandings that we want the students to demonstrate.

"WHY", or the purpose of the learning, is addressed by having logical and sequential understandings that make sense for students.

"HOW" refers to the road map that the students will use to drive

themselves to the learning journey. These are the range of learning activities, learning strategies, habits / practices, instruction, master classes, etc. that need to be mapped out such that the students can arrive at the goal(s) successfully.

"OBSTACLES" requires the teacher to think of the barriers, student misconceptions, or mindset aspects that need to be addressed such that each and every student can arrive at the learning destination successfully. What could possible roadblocks be for the students? This is about using your understanding and experience of teaching students to identify these.

There are six steps in the process to create the spine or backbone of the unit that addresses the above:

Step One: Extract the skills, the Learning Focus and Elaborations from the AUSVELS / Australian Curriculum Documents

- What we have found works best is for the teacher to create a document that contains all the aspects of the AUSVELS / Australian Curriculum that their unit will be addressing. If you have a scope and sequence document then this would simply mean extracting the information from there. Make sure that you include all the cross-curricula elements such as those found in Personal Learning, Interpersonal Learning, ICT, etc.
- A pitfall schools can fall into is using text books to do **this** work. Don't do this. Most text books are not necessarily a reliable source of accuracy – it is like relying on Wikipedia! Text books can cover too much content and should only be used as you are planning the learning experiences. Go to the online AUSVELS / Australian Curriculum documentation and use the latest information. This is what you are reporting against.

Step Two: Using the extracted information, identify what you want the students to know and be able to do by the end of the unit

- The information normally contained within the AUSVELS / Australian Curriculum documentation is written in teacher-speak, and even teachers sometimes have difficulty understanding what the curriculum writers were trying to address.
- The intention of identifying what you want the students to **know** and **be able to do** by the end of the unit, and writing this in language appropriate to the year level, is to have the teachers use their experience and understanding of the information from the curriculum documentation to clarify what in reality they would be expecting their students to know and do by the end of the unit. What would be the actions that the teachers would see the students taking on the journey to the learning destination? This forms the acceptable evidence that the students would need to demonstrate that they have arrived at the goal(s).

I can:

I have heard of this	I can do this with help	I can do this on my own	I CAN List Item

- Create a CAN-DO List using the Know and Able to Do sentences using the template provided here. You will notice that the template indicates a progression and increasing depth of understanding. As an greater extension you could add a fourth column which indicates "I have taught someone how to do this".
- This Can-Do list can be given to the students to progressively indicate their progress towards achieving the goals of the unit. The Can-Do list can be associated with particular learning activities, pages from a text book, as well as lessons to have the students connect to

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the learning that is occurring throughout the unit. Examples of Can-Do Lists can be found here.

Step Three: Create an Overall Goal Understanding followed by a logical sequence of understandings that will naturally lead the students to gain the overall goal understanding you have articulated.

- Key understandings are created to clearly define the purpose (the WHY) of the learning within the unit. They articulate the fundamental deep learning that the unit is being created to achieve.
- Clear key understandings will allow teachers to create authentic essential / fat / fertile questions that can be used to guide and challenge student thinking in particular directions. The sequence of understandings also allow for an authentic and meaningful sequence of learning throughout the unit.
- The sequence of understandings will guide the teaching that will occur throughout the unit and the Can-Do items can be linked to particular understandings.
- The document that describes the process in detail to design the key understandings can be found here.
- It is at this point that authentic learning goals and essential / inquiry questions can be written. Quite often we find teachers trying to design essential questions before being crystal clear about the learning destination or the key understandings. Once the logical sequence of key understandings have been designed it is much easier to design authentic learning goals and essential /inquiry questions that lead to richer and deeper learning.
- For each key understanding identify or create appropriate learning goals and essential questions that would lead the students to reach the understanding.

Step Four: Design a culminating event (or a sequence of assessment) where the students can authentically demonstrate their understanding and skills.

- One of the findings of research into inquiry learning (which includes project based learning and problem based learning) is that assessment that is real, practical and has meaning beyond the day to day of the school, engages students much more than just tests, essays or posters.
- Assessment that is real and has meaning allows for a range of things
    - It sequences learning as the students have to deliver something (a product) by a particular time
    - The product the students are delivering is not necessarily to you but to others in the community (e.g. the whole school, the parents, the council, etc). This creates a significance and importance to what they are doing.

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- When something is significant it can allow students to grapple with the reality of producing something as adults do (and all the associated executive functions required to do so)
- This does not mean that tests, essays, etc are excluded from being used as assessment but are not the necessarily the main element of assessment.

- One other thing to note is the culminating events do not need to be "bigger than Ben Hur". They simply allow for students to demonstrate their understandings, knowledge and skills.
- When working with teachers to create the assessment (or culminating event) I often ask them to brainstorm many possible assessments that would demonstrate the Overall Goal Understanding they articulated in Step Three. As part of this I have them write what elements would they like the students to deliver so they can be assessed.
- You can find some examples of Culminating Events for both primary and secondary schools amongst the sample units from schools here.

Step Five: Identify a checklist of steps that would enable a student to achieve the criteria required for the culminating event.

- The intent of the checklist is twofold:
  - The first intention is to unpack the expert thinking and the process you would go through to successfully complete the assessment. This will give away your thinking. Quite often the thinking of an expert in the area is not apparent to a student. How would an historian think? How would a scientist or engineer go about solving this problem or attacking this project? How would a mathematician unpack this? How would an author or journalist approach this task? The checklist unpacks the thinking of an expert.
  - The second intention of a checklist is that it assists you in identifying the sequence of mini-workshops, instruction, learning experiences and activities, and even homework you could design to develop the capacity of students to achieve the learning goals of the unit.
- To create the checklist you can ask yourself, what steps would I take to achieve this project if it was mine and I was one of the students?
- You can find some examples of checklists amongst the sample units from schools here. There are also two articles about using checklists to support student learning.

Step Six: Create a formative rubric that unpacks key skills you want to develop in the students throughout the unit.

- Most of the rubrics we have seen teachers produce are summative rubric simple used for assessment. This is NOT a formative rubric.
- A formative rubric concretely articulates, in student speak, what that skill looks like at progressive levels.
- K. Anders Ericsson pioneered the research into deliberate practice and he found that skill expertise has more to do with how one practices than with merely performing a skill a large number of times. An expert breaks down the skills that are required to be expert and focuses on improving those skill chunks during practice or day-to-day activities, often paired

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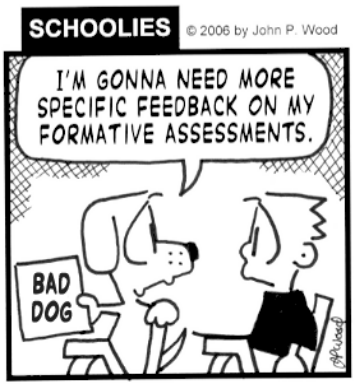
with immediate coaching feedback. Another important feature of deliberate practice lies in continually practicing a skill at more challenging levels with the intention of mastering it.



- We use the structure of a formative rubric to support the teachers to unpack not only what the skill chunks are at different stages of skill development, but to provide a structure for teachers to articulate the explicit approaches they will use to develop and challenge the students.
- Expert teachers generally know what level of skill a student is displaying in the way they are demonstrating in their work. However, this is an instinctual thing with teachers which they address when they see it. If we are going to actually support the students in developing a mastery approach we have to move this from an anecdotal 'on-sight' approach to explicitly articulating what it is we are looking for, the evidence that we require them to produce to demonstrate that they are at a level, and the strategies we will be using to develop their skill.
- Once we have captured this information suddenly the process of developing visible feedback mechanisms that the students drive becomes much easier. The result is that performance increases, the more competent students have a structure that can extend them, teachers have more time to support the struggling students, and the students begin to have tools that allow them to become independent learners.
- It does take time to articulate it well as it challenges the teachers to get really clear about WHAT demonstrable behaviour it is they are looking for.
- I have attached a sample rubric for research so you can get an idea of how we unpacked one skill at a year 8 level.
- You can find some the templates for formative rubrics and examples amongst the sample units from schools here.

Year XXX Unit

Rubric Grid – Teacher Version

Skill	Beginning	Developing	Capable	Evidence of Skill	Teacher Practices / Modelling / Graphic Organisers
				What evidence will demonstrate the development of skills?	What strategies and approaches will you use to develop these skills in your students?
		Plus...	*Plus...*		
		Plus...	*Plus...*		
		Plus...	*Plus...*		

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