

DITCH THE DAILY LESSON PLAN

*How do I plan for meaningful
student learning?*

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Introduction

Early in my teaching career, I shared with a colleague my frustration that although I was teaching according to my lesson plan, my students didn't seem to be learning anything. My colleague gave me some of the best educational advice I'd ever get: "Slow down." At the time, I protested that slowing down seemed like an impossible option; I only had a certain amount of time before I had to administer a test, and I had all the steps leading up to the test neatly laid out in daily plans.

"Slow down," repeated my colleague. "If it's worth doing, then it's worth doing right."

Slowing down meant amending my plans and trying to figure out what the learning priorities were. I was overwhelmed by the colossal responsibility of all that was necessary to have students learn while they were with me.

In their book *Pyramid Response to Intervention* (2009), authors Buffum, Mattos, and Weber posit the following formula: instruction plus time equals learning. If instruction and instructional time were both constant, we might reason that learning levels would also be constant. But we know that not all students learn at the same rate—variability is built into the system. Because of this, we need to reframe the conversation about how students learn. If learning is variable while instruction and instructional time remain constant, then how can teachers help students to learn more?

The answer is simple: They must shake up the equation. Both instruction and instructional time need to be variable so that learning becomes constant. That's the sweet spot, and that's what I'm targeting in this book. How can we build variability of instruction and instructional time into the system to strategically plan for meaningful student learning?

Ditch The Daily Lesson Plan

What we used to do as educators worked when we were simply preparing kids for industry and there were few opportunities for them to leave their hometowns. Now that we're preparing kids for jobs that don't yet exist and opportunities that are limited only by ambition, the time has come for us to modernize our teaching methods. Instructional nostalgia won't work anymore. "The way we've always done it" is no longer an option.

It's time to ditch the daily lesson plan.

I often say in workshops that teachers should stop creating "plans" and start designing lesson "events" or "experiences." Events and experiences help students develop an emotional attachment to their learning that in turn translates into strong memories—and lessons that are memorable are lessons that will stick.

What do you remember about your school experiences? The worksheets you filled out? The comprehension

questions at the end of each chapter you read? The lectures? No? What about those moments that departed from the routine? What about the field trips you took, or that time your teacher dressed up as Jon Bon Jovi and sang the periodic table of elements to the tune of “You Give Love A Bad Name?” That which is memorable sticks.

Some Caveats

I have several colleagues who are concerned with my stance on instruction. As one critical friend bluntly put it, “If you’re going to propose that teachers ditch lesson planning, then their decision to do so must be rooted in their experiences with the process. No time will be saved and no depth will be gained if they just jump to a more sophisticated version of lesson or curriculum design without first understanding the nuances of day-to-day classroom and curriculum management.”

Touché. I don’t disagree. But once teachers internalize those nuances, then it’s time to start ditching some tradition—without necessarily ditching planning wholesale. In their ASCD Arias *Solving 25 Problems in Unit Design* (2015), authors McTighe and Wiggins note that “teachers often design jam-packed units . . . that leave little or no time allotted to address the inevitable setbacks and unexpected interruptions” that are bound to occur (p. 43). They describe scenarios in which teachers with too much content to cover try to maximize class time by teaching everything that needs to be taught rather than focusing on the learning that’s happening. When we boil what we do down to intentional actions,