

Unit of Inquiry Planning Guide & Reference

The purpose of the unit planner

With an inquiry-based approach, more often than not, the unit planned is not the unit delivered and, for this reason, our Unit Planner is not intended to be used in a step by step, 'straight line' manner. It is intended to help teachers to initially map out a journey of inquiry and then be used as a working document, one that is modified and added to as the learning journey progresses.

It is a reasonable expectation that a unit of inquiry cannot be fully planned before it begins to be implemented. For example, the Instructional Plan section of the planner cannot be finalised until you know more fully what the students need or want to know. It is initially enough to sketch out the intentions of the Instructional Plan and then revisit it as the unit progresses, using the Reflection & Evaluation column of the planner to modify your intentions as learning needs become more apparent.

Whilst the planner is an accountability tool that helps our administration team to track the coverage of curriculum standards, the main audience is essentially you, the writer. For this reason, the planner can be modified to suit your purposes for a particular unit of inquiry. The only expectation is that a rigorous inquiry-based, student-centred approach is used, fundamental to a social constructivist approach to learning.

The purpose of this guide

This guide is a collection of explanations and prompts for thinking about strategies to use under each heading of the planner. There are many ways to approach the intention of each heading and, again, the suggestions are not prescriptive. Good teachers are eclectic, adaptable and creative, constantly coming up with improved or more suitable ways to advance student learning. Hopefully, the suggestions that follow will stimulate ideas that best suit the realization of the intended learning outcomes of each particular unit.

At first, you will likely use the guide as a checklist and that provision is included in its design. As you become more familiar with using the planner, this guide will become more of a reference than a checklist and used less often.

Desired results

What do you want students to know and/or be able to do?

From the relevant Scope & Sequence chart, copy and paste the Big Idea, Essential Questions and Enduring Understandings into their respective boxes in the planner.

Use these and the Prompts, Cross-cutting Concepts (Science) and Benchmarks from the Scope & Sequence charts to help you list any further understandings, skills and values that you feel are relevant to the needs and interests of the students in your context. Using the Pre-Test section below, you will add to this list later.

Without compromising the integrity of your intended outcomes, consider if it is authentically possible to integrate the Unit of Inquiry with other learning areas, such as English Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, Art, Music, ICT or Physical Education. If you can readily identify a synergistic fit, consult the specialist teacher (if appropriate) and write a brief note describing that fit in the 'Possible integration ...' box of the planner.

1. Big Idea
2. Essential Questions
3. Enduring Understandings
4. School-based understandings, skills and values
5. Possible integration with other learning areas

Check

Pre-test

What do the students already know or think they know about this unit?

Tuning in to student thinking:

This is tuning you into the existing knowledge and skills of the students. You could use a T-chart of '1st thoughts' and '2nd thoughts' for students to individually list their prior knowledge of the unit, or a similar student-centred approach.

1. What activities will you use to determine existing levels of understanding, skills and values? (Use this later to help students connect 'new' learning with the 'known')
2. Use the 'What we think – What we want to know – What we have learnt' (TWL) display chart to complete the **What we think** column.
3. Consider how to extend existing knowledge, skills and values and how to cater for a range of entry levels to the unit.

Check

Initial formative assessment:

Further identify the learning gaps by using a suitable assessment task to compare existing knowledge with the desired outcomes.

1. How will you make the thinking of students visible?
2. What evidence will you periodically gather to inform your progress?
3. How will you know when to progress to the next learning phase?

Check**Anticipated further formative assessment strategies:**

Assessment tasks along the inquiry journey can sometimes be anticipated and listed in this section. They may also become apparent as the unit progresses and you can list them in the Reflection & Evaluation column of the planner retrospectively.

If you have used a T-chart of '1st thoughts' and '2nd thoughts' for tuning in to student thinking, you will need to consider when to use the '2nd thoughts' column of the T-chart. A 'Wonder Box' for students to post questions in is another useful way to track student thinking as they progress through the unit. These strategies will help to inform anecdotal records or checklists that you keep as assessment devices.

Instructional plan (the search for meaning)

Provide a plan of your instructional activities, including time and materials needed. Map out, in steps, how you will get from the introduction of the unit to its conclusion so that by the end, your students can succeed on the culminating task and meet the benchmarks. Use the following steps as a guide, in the knowledge that they are flexible, malleable and fluid.

Statement of significance to our school Vision & Mission:

1. How does this unit support and reflect the stated school mission and beliefs?
2. What will make students care about this unit?
3. How will this unit activate prior knowledge and motivate the desire to think beyond the known?
4. How is this unit relevant to the students' lives beyond school?

Check**Tuning in (to the topic) – motivation and engagement**

1. How will you communicate to students the context and purpose of their learning?
2. What experience(s) will immerse students in this topic?
3. What will provoke student curiosity and wonderment?
4. How will you make visible students' current thinking and conceptions about this topic?
5. Use the 'What we think – What we want to know – What we have learnt' (TWL) display chart to complete the **What we want to know** column.
6. Include the use of student learning journals that track progress with thinking and levels of understanding.

Finding out – gathering data first hand that links to the unit understandings, skills and values

1. What inquiry tools (processes & skills) will students use in this unit and how will you explicitly teach those?
2. Which teaching strategies and tools will you use to facilitate learning?
3. How could you include meaningful links across learning areas?
4. In what ways and when will students collaborate and work individually?

Sorting out – making meaning and sense of data, refining thinking

1. What meaning can we make of this data? – compare and contrast
2. What are we learning?
3. How is our thinking changing? (before & after analysis)

Going further – raising & revisiting questions, extending experiences, challenging assumptions.

Usually individually negotiated (differentiation)

Concluding – stating new and refined skills, revised understandings and values

1. How will students reflect on their learning?
2. What do we think and know now?
3. How do we feel?
4. Generalising (concept mapping) – making the synthesis of thinking explicit and transferrable
5. Use the ‘What we think – What we want to know – What we have learnt’ (TWL) display chart to complete the **What we have learnt** column.
6. How will we communicate and celebrate our refined understandings, skills and values, and to whom?

Acting - what we can do with this (the Service Learning component)

1. How can we use what we have learnt?
2. Is there an action that seems important to take?
3. How will we make it happen?

Evidence of learning**Summative Assessment**

How will you know if students have achieved the desired result and can meet the standard(s) and benchmark(s)? – consider the understandings, skills, values and standards

1. Provide a description of the culminating task(s).
2. Provide the scoring guide or rubric for the culminating task(s).

Standard(s) and Relevant Benchmark(s) Covered – from scope & sequence:

From the relevant Scope & Sequence chart, copy and paste those standards and benchmarks that were actually covered during the unit of inquiry.

Check

Check

Unit evaluation

How successful was this unit?

1. To what extent were the enduring understandings understood?
2. To what extent were the standards met? Please list those not met.
3. In general, what are the remaining gaps in student learning?
4. What are your recommendations for the future improvement of this unit?
5. What are your recommendations about the resources available for this unit?

Check

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