

Taking The Lesson Further

toolkits

Cross-Curricular Planning And Pbl's

Can You Change The Summative Assessment Into A Project Based Learning Assessment?

The Common Core State Standards push for more authentic learning assessments and projects: for more PBL's (or project based learning) where students have the opportunity to show their knowledge in projects with real world relevancy. The Common Core definitely emphasizes more student-centered instruction and student-created content, so how can this be incorporated within the unit themselves?

According to Edutopia's series on Schools that Work (www.edutopia.org), the keys to success with a great project are:

1. Starting with your Common Core State Standards (can you make it a cross curricular unit?)
2. Entry Events: Define Learning Goals (introducing the project to students and giving them "bread crumbs" to get them started)
3. Assessing and adjusting throughout the project
4. Collaborating: Peer feedback (critical friends "peer groups" for students)
5. Assessing on multiple learning outcomes

Can You Create Cross-Curricular Units And/Or Projects?

The Common Core State Standards push for students to get an equal amount of fiction and nonfiction by the fourth grade, gradually increasing to 55% nonfiction in eighth grade, to—finally—70% nonfiction by twelfth grade. The only way to push this mandate through is to read nonfiction across all content areas. As a teacher becomes more familiar with their standards (and has created their yearly scope and sequence), the next step would be to see how one could cross into other content areas to make the standards relevant throughout the school and even into real-life application. By showing how the standards connect to one another—as well as how reading for instance is not just "something you will do in language arts"—it becomes easier for students to achieve the ultimate goal of proficiency and critical thinking skills that allows them to make their learning habitual. Linking a standard across several content areas allows for multiple opportunities to practice and gives the increased chance of transference.

Teachers should begin to look at curriculum mapping not just within their own department but begin having conversations across content areas when attached to standards. While some might look at a theme, the push to Common Core suggests that you look at the standards as your "common denominator" in this instance.

Maybe a science and math teacher can get together and plan a project based across curricular activity. Or, perhaps, a language arts and social studies teacher. These are obviously the easiest pairings, but what about elective teachers? What about the science of sound? Is there a way to have a music teacher and a science teacher get together to work on an activity? Begin the process with a simple conversation such as: “The standards I’m going to be working on are...What standards in your content area will match with that?” and just plan from there. A curriculum map made in a school that truly shows connections between different content areas would be of major value.

The more an interactive web can be woven between content areas, the better off the students will be because they are hearing the information multiple times within different contexts. It will sink in and make the learning that much more enriched.

Example Fourth Grade Curriculum Map Planner

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
ELA	Unit 1: Explanatory Writing				Unit 2: How to Read Nonfiction Texts				
Math	Unit 1: Graphs and Numbers				Unit 2: Place Value, and Measurement				
Science	Unit 1: Measuring and Comparing			Unit 2: Sound, Light, and Heat					
Social Studies	Unit 1: Mapping Skills			Unit 2: Culture of Regions				Unit 2: Culture of Regions	

** The simple act of laying out the units for the year with a team of teachers allows you to start seeing connections.*

Collaboration is Key

Hopefully your school or district has given time to allow collaboration between teachers. Some districts allow late start-times one day a week for this purpose. Some Asian schools have found a different approach to this idea; their class sizes are much larger than those seen in the U.S. and allow for fewer classes and more time to confer with colleagues. While it’s clear that American teachers prefer smaller class sizes, that doesn’t negate the fact that collaboration time with peers is imperative. Developing a positive and interactive report with your fellow educators can often be challenging, but here are a few tips:

- Show up early to meetings: Most of the time, the best collaboration comes in the beginning where people are first just flowing with ideas.
- Step out of your comfort zone: Make friends within your own building and show that you are accessible and willing to collaborate.
- Ask for help: Some of the challenges you are facing might be the same as someone else, why not work together to overcome those challenges?

- Develop a PLN: A PLN (professional learning network) of teachers from around the globe can be invaluable! Take advantage of those social networking platforms like Twitter, Pinterest, Edmodo, Schoology etc. Don’t feel guilty, however, about weeding out your PLN from time to time. If you aren’t using Pinterest as much, focus more energy towards Twitter. Figure out what works for you, and what you will get the greatest returns on for your questions.

Every lesson should also have some element of student collaboration or conversation. Think about ways within your lesson planning to allow students to do this. This not only relates back to the Common Core State Standards—maintaining the idea that students must collaborate in all contents on daily consistent basis—but it also relates to best practice within most ESOL trainings. Teaching students to be critical thinkers increases retention of instructional content and makes the learning experience much more engaging. This also allows teachers and educators to address multiple standards in the Common Core on Speaking and Listening. And the lifelong skill of understanding how to communicate with others is something that will help them the rest of their educational career and beyond.

Develop Student Responsibility (Move The Onus From The “Sage On The Stage” To The Students)

Regardless of grade level, teachers need to consider when lesson planning with the common core ways to allow students to hold more responsibility. Unintentionally, some of our current pedagogical practices actually take away the students opportunity to learn and think critically. If you continue to teach in a way where all students are lock-stepped together in their learning, the experience becomes passive and not engaging. To truly plan a lesson that meets Common Core State Standards and lends itself to the idea of student-centered teaching where students are allowed to problem solve, you have to find a way to step back and let the students “figure things out.” You can still scaffold and front-load, but you should also find a way to allow activities into the lesson that give students those problem-solving opportunities. Since this is a major pedagogical shift, this might seem a bit like a three-ring circus. Yet, instead of having all students moving forward at the same time, you will start to see differentiation occur. Some of the accelerated students might move faster and really problem solve ahead of time, while others might require more re-teaching since they haven’t mastered the content yet. By figuring out ways to ask students to figure out the next step—or asking to prove or sometimes even teach their knowledge—you begin to shift the onus more to the students rather than having all learning be so teacher-centered.