



Keeping Students Engaged Systematically Using the Instructional Planning Resource

by Stu Ervay



Virtual teaching is a challenge. Many teachers were not ready to conduct instruction using the internet. Much had to be learned to make the new medium work for students AND teachers.

And if that challenge was not enough, teachers were also asked to use what is known as a hybrid model. A term that means teaching occurs in BOTH classroom and virtual settings.

Back and forth.

Which is hard, especially when teachers learn students do not have computers or are not connected to the internet. Or both. And when parents do not allow their children to attend school for fear of catching the virus.

Meeting such overwhelming challenges has resulted in major disruptions in the continuum of student learning. Chances are good that conditions, while not as bad as the first stages of the pandemic, will be unsettled for months or years.

Therefore, contingency planning by curriculum councils should be vigorous and ongoing. Subject area committees, operating under the auspices of councils, should stay ready for any eventuality. The old idea that we can depend on a single medium for teaching public school students is no longer valid.

Client districts using CLI's *Instructional Planning Resource (IPR)* can connect contingency planning to **intentional** forms of instruction. The IPR does not overcome the lack of personal computers, home-based internet availability, or willingness of parents to risk their children getting sick. But it does give structure to how teachers plan for variable instructional settings.

The IPR contains everything necessary for thinking-through and planning instruction, virtual or not. In clear and specific phrases, it includes the mastery purpose of the course, well-constructed unit outcomes, and their components. It provides information on how to formatively assess student performance. It describes teaching methods, student activities and resources to be used. Alternative or "differentiated" instructional techniques are inserted.

And the summative assessment is not just a one-off pencil and paper test, but a clearly described method to determine if students have indeed met criteria in each component.

Client districts using the IPR model know it to be challenging to create for teachers accustomed to writing and using daily lesson plans. It requires training wordsmith intentions for student learning accurately and comprehensively, and considerable imagination to project all possible variations as to possible methods, student activities, and resources to use.

But developing skills to write IPRs is worth the effort on many levels, not the least of which is a teacher's cognitive engagement with the curriculum to be taught.

First, the IPR can be saved in a digital databank and used repeatedly. Because it is saved in a computer, it can be modified any time conditions require. Portions of it can be shared virtually with students or on a classroom screen.

Second, an IPR eliminates the need to create elaborate daily lesson plans. Teachers can keep track of where they are in the margins. They can also code the IPR for use in pacing guides or individualized instruction.

Third, the IPR provides a quick glance at the amount of curriculum to be covered in a standard classroom setting, thereby giving teachers a clear indication of how much seat time is necessary.

If the class is being taught virtually, the teacher can get a sense of how quickly students are progressing.

If instructional conditions are poor because of the medium being used, as in virtual formats, the teacher may need to delete part of an intended curriculum. Having to skip parts of an intended curriculum inadvertently happens now. The difference when using an IPR is that the portion deleted can be done intentionally instead of just “running out of time.” Having that option available is important for two reasons: (1) a deleted portion may be selected because it is the least essential element, and (2) knowing what was deleted can be revisited later when more time and opportunity are available.

The pandemic has taught us to be ready for almost anything. In addition, it is teaching us that virtual or hybrid forms of instruction do not need to be inadequate stopgap measures. They may not be perfect but, as with many other things in this “new normal,” those instructional settings can work if we plan ahead more thoroughly and precisely.