

Introduction/Background

As many of you know, this is my first year here in Lansing as the Director of Teaching and Learning. Prior to this position, I was the Secondary Instructional Coach for the Piper school district for two years, a high school instructional coach at F.L. Schlagle (KCKPS) for two years, and an English teacher at Washington High School (KCKPS) for seven years. I also am an adjunct at KCKCC teaching Comp I, II, and Introduction to College Literature.

As far as education is concerned, I graduated with my Bachelors in Science degree(Secondary Education - Social Studies) from UMKC in 2010, and earned two Master's degrees (Literature and School Administration/Leadership) from Baker University in 2014 and 2016.

Explanation of my role as Director of Teaching and Learning

First off, let me say how honored I am to be in this position. Not many people can say they work in a job that is their actual passion, but I am fortunate enough to do so. I LOVE everything when it comes to pedagogy (teaching) and learning. Nothing beats the rush of seeing a student understand and learn a new concept or skill, and as educators we have the ability to help kids on their educational journey every single day they are in our presence!

My role as the Director of Teaching and Learning focuses specifically on the following:

- Ensuring every teacher is familiar and constantly answering Rick DuFour's Four Questions when it comes to learning:
 1. What do we want students to know and be able to do (Standards and Skills)?
 2. How do we know they can do it? (Formative and Summative Assessments)
 3. What do we do when they do not learn it? (Re-teach or Tier 2/3 intervention)
 4. What do we do when they already know it or learn it quicker than other students? (Enrichment)
- Helping teachers in creating GVCs (Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum) for all contents K-12 (More below).
- Helping teachers create common formative (checks for understanding as you go) and common summative (culminating) assessments and using the data to adjust and refine instruction (More below).

- Improving our instructional techniques and skills by introducing effective strategies that will keep kids engaged, motivated, and also give them an opportunity to demonstrate learning.
- Ensure that students are being taught at the appropriate level of where they are and to constantly make instruction rigorous
- Help teachers and students engage in “Authentic Literacy,” where they are constantly reading, thinking, writing, and speaking about text and what they are learning.
- Stay true to the adoption process of curriculum resources and ensure that said resources are effective, engaging, and backed by research.

GVC - Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

A GVC is synonymous to a curriculum map for a course: it is the road map of what students will be taught. The “Guaranteed” means that we guarantee that every student has access to the same standards, learning goals, and assessments. The “Viable” means that it is possible to teach the amount of content in the amount of instructional time that we have. (See Form)

The GVC is the foundation of everything that we do, and specifically answers the first two questions of Rick DuFour’s Four Questions (What do we want students to learn and how will we know they have learned it?).

In addition to serving as our road map and ensuring every student has the opportunity to learn and grow, the GVC also sets the stage for an educational shift that is necessary: a shift to standards-based grading for mastery. We will use this lens when we revamp our K-5 grade cards this upcoming semester.

Assessment

Before elaborating on assessments, I would like to share two quotes that I love concerning learning:

Quote #1:

“If the students haven’t learned it, have you really taught it?”

This quote is the backbone of the philosophy of assessment, in my opinion. What’s the point of spending copious amounts of time planning, instructing, and grading if the kids don’t learn it? In addition to using solid curriculum resources and effective instruction,

we must constantly be assessing our students for evidence of learning. This doesn't mean quizzes and tests all the time; we can simply ask questions or give them engaging activities for them to demonstrate their learning. We can use bellwork, closure activities, and a plethora of informal assessments to gauge whether a student has learned something or not.

Quote #2:

“Practice how we play.”

As a huge sports fan, I really connected with this quote. If a team is playing an upcoming game against an opponent who plays a certain style or system, then the coach better make sure his players are able to show up on game day ready to play against that style or system. A good coach will use the preceding practices modeling and having the players get used to this style or system.

The same should happen in the classroom when it comes to learning and assessments. Teachers should constantly be having the students “practice how they’ll play” by engaging in consistent checks for understanding (formative assessments) to make sure students are prepared for “game day” (the summative assessment).

Assessments need to become something teachers engage in and give to students not to only provide a grade, but to ensure students are learning and mastering the standards and content being taught to them.

Our district focuses on three major assessments:

1. **FastBridge** - This is a math and reading screener (formative) that we give to students three times a year (Fall, Winter, Spring). We also use the results to place our students in Tier 2 and 3 intervention. We use the Spring scores as a way to check how our students did at the end of the year compared to students in the rest of the country. It also gives us an idea as a district how we are operating as a system.
2. **State Assessment (KITE)**: This summative test is given once a year in the Spring for students grades 3rd-8th, 10th, and 11th grade. All students but 11th graders take the ELA and Math portion of the assessment. 5th, 8th, and 11th graders take the Science portion as well. 4th, 7th, and 11th graders take the new Social Studies assessment.
3. **ACT**: The ACT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions. It is a multiple-choice, pencil-and-paper test

administered by ACT, Inc. The purpose of the ACT test is to measure a high school student's readiness for college, and provide colleges with one common data point that can be used to compare all applicants.

Instructional Strategies

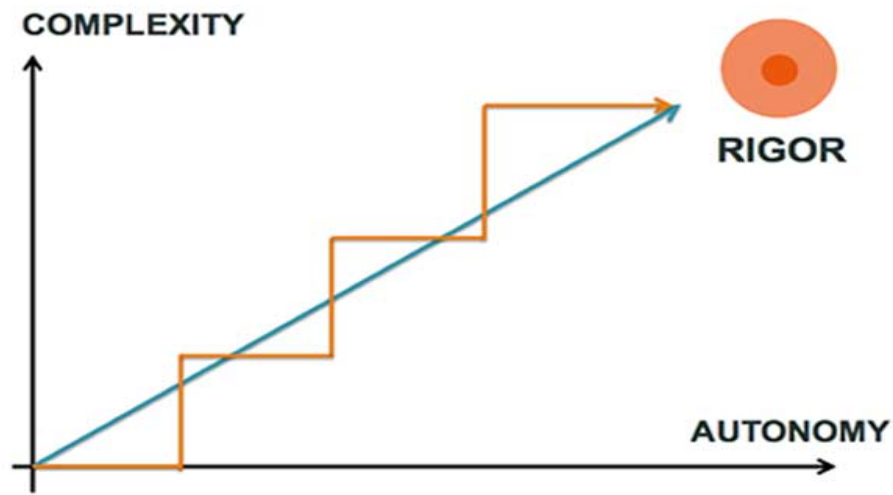
Nobody would dispute that everything above is important and beneficial for our students. However, without the proper and effective instructional strategies to go along with it all, the chances of our students learning and retaining the knowledge is not very high. For that reason, it is imperative that we utilize the most effective instructional strategies when we are teaching. Here are a few of the heavy hitters:

- Specific and clear learning targets given/show to students with the students reflecting and self-assessing
- Engagement activities and hooks to get students interested
- Skill-based bellwork that has students re-visiting prior learning
- Closure activities for students to demonstrate their learning
- Large amounts of opportunities for students to work and collaborate together to solve problems and explain their thinking
- The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model: (I Do, We Do, Two Do, You Do)
- Exposing Students to content in multiple ways and modalities
- Creating experiences that will lead to better retention of the knowledge
- Differentiating to meet students' needs
- Fostering a "Growth Mindset" and willingness to keep trying when you don't succeed with a problem
- Constant opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning and teachers to check for understanding

Teaching, much like cooking, is definitely an art. However, teachers can add specific strategies (think ingredients and recipes) to ensure that it yields better results.

The other aspect of instruction that cannot be forgotten is rigor. Often times we confuse rigor with "more," or "harder work," when in fact that couldn't be further from the truth. In the classroom, rigor should be viewed as challenging and thought-provoking work that allows students to reach their individual potential. Rigorous work is complex work combined with students being able to achieve or complete said work on their own effectively. This chart illustrates it very well:

Scaffolding to Rigor



Goals for the 2021-2022 School Year

While the Lansing school district is in a solid place, and even though I am still new to the position/district, I feel there are many items that I can focus on and achieve this year. Here are my goals for the 2021-2022 school year:

1. Ensure teachers have interacted and learned Rick DuFour's Four Questions and use them when planning units and lessons.
2. Create GVCs for K-5 ELA and Math, as well as 6-12 Social Studies and Spanish 1 and 2.
3. Use the above GVCs to revamp the K-5 grade cards to be standards/skill-based instead of letter grade based. Also bring consistency to the grade cards so parents feel they are useful (+, -, = system)
4. Provide teachers with effective strategies to engage, motivate, and help students retain knowledge.
5. Improve our staff's ability to check for understanding constantly and react effectively to fill gaps or push kids further. Have ELA and Math teachers use the formative KITE "mini-tests" to prepare kids for the state assessment (practice how we play).
6. Help teachers recognize the importance of relationships and engagement when it comes to learning. I love the quote, "Kids don't learn from teachers they don't like."
7. Help teachers utilize the new intervention tool purchased this year (MobyMax).
8. Ensure that teachers are comfortable engaging in authentic literacy with students, and understand the importance of students having "eyes on text," constantly.

9. Ensure we are on track when it comes to our ARC (Accreditation Review Council) visit next year by following the recommendations given by our Outside Visitation Team.
10. Continue my “Instructional Leadership Studies” learning with all Lansing administrators to help them grow as instructional leaders.