My Approach To Teaching, Learning, and Unit Design

Designing Learning Worth Remembering

Instructional Planning Cycle

1. Know My Learners

- surveys
- observations
- conversations
- strengths & identities

2. Student Voice & Relationships

- community circles
- choice
- interests
- co-creating culture

3. Backward Design

- curriculum expectations
- big ideas
- success criteria
- authentic assessment

4. Access, Equity & Inclusion

- UDL
- Text Selection Tool
- Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy
- Waterfalls accommodations

5. Responsive Instruction

- flexible groupings
- heterogeneous & homogeneous
- PWIM
- MLL supports
- technology integration

6. Assessment for, as, and of Learning

Assessment for Learning	Assessment as Learning	Assessment of Learning	Triangulation
observations, conversations, exit tickets	self-assessment, reflection, goal setting	products, demonstrations, culminating tasks	

7. Reflection & Refinement

- feedback
- consultation
- next steps
- professional learning

Relationships • Curiosity • Purposeful Design

This summary is organized into three interconnected areas that reflect my professional practice: my planning philosophy, the instructional frameworks that guide my decision-making, and the ways these frameworks are implemented in daily classroom practice. At the centre of my practice is a commitment to responsive planning, intentional instruction, inclusive assessment, and the creation of classroom communities where every student experiences connection, challenge, reflection, belonging, and success.

1. My Planning Philosophy

My instructional planning begins with relationships. At the beginning of each school year, I intentionally take time to learn about each student through surveys, conversations, observations, learning profiles, and ongoing classroom interactions. I also use **Community Circles** as an intentional structure for building connection, trust, student voice, and a strong sense of classroom belonging. These circles help students feel seen, heard, respected, and valued as members of a learning community.

Drawing on **Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences** and **Barry Bennett's Instructional Intelligence**, I seek to understand students' strengths, interests, identities, lived experiences, and preferred ways of learning. This knowledge becomes the foundation for the units, lessons, learning experiences, groupings, accommodations, and assessments I design. Rather than planning for a generic class, I strive to plan for the actual learners in front of me.

My planning is grounded in **Backward Design** and **Understanding by Design**. I begin with curriculum expectations, enduring understandings, essential questions, success criteria, and authentic assessment opportunities before determining the daily instructional pathway. This ensures that instruction is purposeful, coherent, and aligned with meaningful learning goals. It also helps me plan intentionally for **assessment for learning**, **assessment as learning**, and **assessment of learning** from the beginning of the unit rather than treating assessment as something that happens only at the end.

Throughout the planning process, I use **Universal Design for Learning**, or **UDL**, to proactively identify and remove barriers. I aim to provide students with multiple ways to access content, engage with learning, process ideas, and demonstrate understanding. This includes planning for different entry points, visual supports, oral language opportunities, collaborative learning, independent practice, assistive tools, and varied assessment options.

Equity, inclusion, and responsiveness are central to my planning. My practice is informed by YRDSB resources such as the **Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy**, **DARBS**, the **Text Selection Tool**, the **Anti-Oppressive Planning Framework**, and

the **Waterfalls Accommodations** planning tool. These resources help me think more critically about whose voices are represented, whose experiences are affirmed, what barriers may exist, and how I can design instruction that is culturally responsive, identity-affirming, and accessible.

When students continue to experience difficulty despite universal supports and classroom accommodations, I also refer to the **Pre-Referral Intervention Manual**, or **PRIM**, as a resource for identifying practical, targeted strategies before moving toward more formal referral processes. The **PRIM Manual** supports my ability to respond thoughtfully to student needs by considering specific interventions related to attention, organization, language, behaviour, academic skill development, and classroom participation. In this way, **PRIM** becomes part of a responsive planning cycle connected to **assessment for learning**, because the strategies I select are informed by ongoing evidence gathered through classroom observation, student work, conversations, and reflection.

I also value professional collaboration as an essential part of effective planning. Consultation with colleagues, school teams, and Board specialists, including Community Cultural Liaisons, Equity and Inclusive Education Consultants and Community Connected Experiential Learning Consultants, has helped deepen my understanding and strengthen my practice. Their perspectives support me in designing learning experiences that are culturally responsive, community-connected, and attentive to student identity, voice, lived experience, strengths, and needs.

2. Instructional Frameworks That Guide My Practice

The following frameworks, tools, and approaches inform my instructional decision-making:

- **Backward Design / Understanding by Design**
- **Universal Design for Learning / UDL**
- **Assessment for learning**
- **Assessment as learning**
- **Assessment of learning**
- **Triangulation of assessment**
- **Conversations, observations, and products**
- **Flexible and fluid instructional groupings**
- **Heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings**
- **Multilingual Language Learners / MLLs**
- **Picture Word Inductive Model / PWIM**
- **Barry Bennett's Instructional Intelligence**
- **Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences**
- **Community Circles**
- **Community Learning Circles**
- **Waterfalls Accommodations** planning tool
- **Pre-Referral Intervention Manual / PRIM**
- **Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy / DARBS**

- **Text Selection Tool**
- **Anti-Oppressive Planning Framework**
- **Traffic light self-assessment**
- **Exit tickets**
- **Conferences**
- **Peer feedback**
- **Formative assessment**
- **Student voice**
- **Culturally responsive teaching**

3. Planning in Action

In daily classroom practice, these frameworks work together as part of an integrated and responsive approach. Rather than using any one model in isolation, I draw from multiple frameworks to make instructional decisions based on student need, curriculum goals, assessment evidence, identity, lived experience, language development, strengths, and classroom context.

Community Circles are an important part of how I create the conditions for learning. They provide students with regular opportunities to connect with one another, listen actively, share experiences, develop empathy, and contribute to the classroom community. These circles support relationship-building between teacher and student, as well as among students themselves. They help establish a culture of respect, accountability, trust, and belonging, which makes deeper academic risk-taking possible.

Community Learning Circles extend this work by creating structured opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and shared meaning-making. Through **Community Learning Circles**, students are invited to think about what they are learning, how they are learning, what strategies are helping them, and what next steps they may need. This connects directly to **assessment as learning**, because students are developing metacognition, self-awareness, and ownership of their learning. They are not simply receiving feedback; they are learning how to reflect on feedback, name their growth, identify challenges, and set meaningful goals.

Assessment for learning is embedded throughout my instruction. I use strategies such as **traffic light self-assessment**, **exit tickets**, student conferences, oral check-ins, small-group instruction, peer feedback, observation, and questioning to gather timely information about student understanding. This evidence informs my next steps as an educator. It helps me determine when to regroup students, reteach a concept, slow down, move forward, provide enrichment, adjust a task, introduce accommodations, or offer additional scaffolding.

When students are struggling, I use the evidence gathered through **assessment for learning** to determine which supports may be most appropriate. In addition to consulting student profiles, IEPs, the **Waterfalls Accommodations** planning tool, and colleagues, I may draw on the **Pre-Referral Intervention Manual**, or **PRIM**, to identify targeted

classroom-based interventions. This helps me move beyond a general sense that a student is having difficulty and instead consider specific, practical strategies connected to the student's demonstrated needs. The **PRIM Manual** supports a thoughtful and proactive approach to intervention by helping me select strategies, monitor their impact, and adjust instruction before considering next steps.

Assessment as learning is developed when students are given opportunities to reflect on their own progress and participate actively in the learning process. Tools such as **traffic light self-assessment**, reflection prompts, goal-setting, success criteria, peer conversations, and **Community Learning Circles** help students become more aware of themselves as learners. These practices encourage students to ask: What am I learning? How do I know I am improving? What strategy helped me? What do I need next? This strengthens student agency and helps students become more independent, reflective, and confident learners.

Assessment of learning is used to evaluate and communicate what students have learned in relation to curriculum expectations and success criteria. My use of **assessment of learning** includes culminating tasks, written products, presentations, projects, performances, conferences, and other demonstrations of understanding. These assessments are designed through **Backward Design** so that they are connected to the big ideas, skills, and curriculum expectations of the unit. Whenever possible, I provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate their learning, in alignment with **UDL** and responsive assessment practices.

I use **triangulation of assessment — conversations, observations, and products** — to develop a fuller and more accurate picture of student learning. This is especially important because students demonstrate understanding in different ways. Some students may communicate their thinking most clearly through oral language, some through visual representation, some through written work, some through collaborative discussion, and some through performance or hands-on demonstration. By using **triangulation of assessment**, I avoid relying on a single product or moment in time and instead gather evidence from multiple sources.

Flexible and fluid grouping is another important part of my practice. Students move between **heterogeneous groupings** and **homogeneous groupings** depending on the learning goal, instructional purpose, language needs, social dynamics, demonstrated strengths, and formative assessment evidence. These groupings are never fixed. They are adjusted regularly to support collaboration, targeted instruction, peer learning, confidence-building, enrichment, consolidation, and intervention.

For **Multilingual Language Learners**, or **MLLs**, I intentionally plan opportunities to build language alongside content knowledge. Students are supported through explicit vocabulary instruction, visual scaffolds, structured oral language practice, sentence frames, modelling, collaborative talk, and opportunities to rehearse ideas before writing. The **Picture Word Inductive Model**, or **PWIM**, is one strategy I use to help students

move from observation and oral language toward vocabulary development, reading, sentence construction, and written composition.

The **Waterfalls Accommodations** planning tool helps me begin from student strengths and plan proactively rather than reactively. By embedding accommodations and supports into instruction from the outset, I can reduce barriers and create more accessible learning experiences for all students. When additional strategies are needed, the **Pre-Referral Intervention Manual / PRIM** provides another layer of support by helping me identify targeted interventions that can be implemented, observed, and refined within the classroom context. This aligns closely with **Universal Design for Learning**, or **UDL**, where access, flexibility, and student agency are considered during the planning process rather than added afterward.

My commitment to equity is also reflected in the materials, texts, tasks, and conversations I bring into the classroom. Using resources such as the **Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy**, the **Text Selection Tool**, and the **Anti-Oppressive Planning Framework**, I strive to select learning materials that reflect diverse identities, challenge harmful stereotypes, affirm student experiences, and invite critical thinking. These tools help me plan learning that is not only academically meaningful, but also culturally responsive and socially conscious.

Ultimately, my goal is to continually refine my practice through reflection, collaboration, professional learning, and responsiveness to students. Instructional frameworks and Board resources provide an important foundation, but the most meaningful planning happens when these tools are combined with strong relationships, student voice, culturally responsive pedagogy, intentional assessment, and a sincere commitment to equity. Through intentional use of **Community Circles**, **Community Learning Circles**, **assessment for learning**, **assessment as learning**, **assessment of learning**, **UDL**, **triangulation of assessment**, **Waterfalls Accommodations**, **PRIM**, and responsive instructional design, I work to ensure that every learner experiences connection, challenge, reflection, belonging, dignity, and success.