Making the Planning Process Your Own: How to Use the Template

Teachers within and across schools are now constructing and posting their units online to make them available to their colleagues. They often replace the CFI logo with their own and make other minor adjustments to reflect their own contexts. That’s the beauty of the process. Additionally, the open-ended nature of the template makes it transferrable to different grade levels. The same beliefs, guiding questions, materials, and instructional strategies may be adapted for different student populations. In fact, many teachers are collaborating within grade levels to construct complementary units that reflect required content and standards. They are also sharing templates across vertical teams to deliberately scaffold student learning in ways that deepen and broaden their learning experiences over time.
Planning Units of Study: Center for Inquiry

Envisioning Possibilities: Planning on Paper
Our best planning comes from making predictions and creating conditions for students to engage in particular kinds of thinking (for example, strategies, skills, and content connections).
When planning demonstrations or engagements, it is critical to ask ourselves what kind of thinking, conversations, and learning strategies we want to promote.

Bringing Plans to Life
Curriculum is the transaction occurring among teacher, students, and resources within and across curricular structures; such as morning meetings, reading, writing, and math workshops and units of study in the social and physical sciences.

Responsive teaching is about identifying patterns in kidwatching data and planning responsively for individuals, small groups, and for whole-class instruction. From kidwatching to curriculum, from moment to moment as well as planning ahead—the teacher designs minilessons deciding what or who to highlight during strategy sharing sessions.

Creating curriculum with and for children to help them think, work, and communicate as readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and social scientists by working within an apprenticeship model (working in front of, alongside and behind students).

(Mills with CFI faculty, 2008)
**Beliefs that Underpin this Inquiry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method(s) or Investigation(s) that will Promote Authentic Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How might students learn the skillfulness of inquiry? Given the questions posed, would observations, interviews, experiments, surveys, controlled studies, or other methods best support this inquiry?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions to Frame this Particular Inquiry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Demonstrations and Engagements throughout this Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the primary teaching and learning strategies to be employed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Envisioning a Possible Touchstone Experience

Just as touchstone texts are accessed throughout units of study in reading and writing workshop and revisited over and over again to deepen and broaden learning, touchstone experiences are foundational to units of study in the sciences and social sciences. Field studies, visits to the pond, author studies, summer inquiries, science experiments, teaching/learning projects, genealogy projects, and expert projects are a few examples of touchstone experiences. Given the key demonstrations and engagements planned, which one might best serve as a touchstone experience?

Strategies, Skills, Content, and Concepts to be Addressed through Demonstrations, Engagements, and Touchstone Experiences

What standards will be uncovered through this inquiry?

Strategies for Reflecting on and Documenting Learning

How might we demonstrate growth and change? What are our new questions?
NARRATIVE 3: Planning Units of Study: Using a Unit Template

Reflexivity: Studying Ourselves and the Implementation of this Unit of Study to Grow and to Change

How did it go? What do we want to hold onto? What do we want to revise?

Data Sources (Primary and Secondary) to Support this Inquiry:
Envisioning Text Sets with Books, Videos, and Artifacts, and Possible Collaborations with Related Arts and Technology

Possible Guiding Questions for Planning

Conceptual

- Perspectives: Which perspectives (reader, writer, mathematician, scientist, and/or social scientist) offer potential insights or strategies for investigating this unit of study i.e., What questions would a social scientist ask and how might she investigate this issue? What questions would a mathematician ask about this topic?
- Systems: What systems are involved in this unit and how are they related?
- Cycles: Are there cycles embedded in this unit of study? How might we gain a deeper understanding of the unit by investigating the natural and man-made cycles?
NARRATIVE 3: Planning Units of Study: Using a Unit Template

- Change: Has change occurred over time in relation to this unit of study? If so, how might studying the natural or man-made changes help us better understand the topic?
- Voice: Whose voice is heard or privileged? Whose voice is absent or silenced?
- Power: How might power structures help us better understand this issue?

Pragmatic/Universal
- Who developed the idea, invention, or concept?
- Why was the idea or invention created? What was the purpose of the invention give the context and culture of the time period?
- Where did the knowledge or information presented in the materials we are reading in this unit of study come from? Can we trust or believe it? Do we need to access multiple sources to triangulate our knowledge or understanding?
- Have common knowledge, beliefs, or understandings about this topic changed over time? What led to shifts in our beliefs or understandings?

Personal Knowledge
- Why does this knowledge or information matter to me?
- How has what I have learned during this unit changed me?

Social Knowledge
- Why does the knowledge I’m learning in this unit of study matter in the world?

From Personal Knowledge to Social Action
- So what?
- Now what? How might we take action on what we have learned during this unit of study?
- How might we show or demonstrate what we have learned during this unit to others?

(Mills 2013)
Institutionalizing a Way of Thinking About Planning

We begin by envisioning possibilities as we plan on paper. We believe:

*Our best planning comes from making predictions and creating conditions for kids to engage in particular kinds of thinking around strategies, skills and content connections.
*When planning demonstrations or engagements, it is critical to ask ourselves what kind of thinking, conversation or learning strategies we want to promote?

As Carolyn Burke taught us, the best plans are written in pencil. As we bring our paper curriculum to life we know it will change. That happens during daily and weekly planning. For us, curriculum is the transaction among the teacher, students, and materials within and across curricular structures. This transaction is possible when teachers are committed to teaching responsively. Responsive teachers are careful kidwatchers. They identify patterns in their kidwatching data and plan responsively for individuals, small groups, and the whole class. Because kidwatching allows them to know their children well, they create curriculum with and for children. They don’t simply teach reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. They teach readers, writers, mathematicians, scientists, and social scientists by working within an apprenticeship model. They work in front of, alongside, and behind the children as the adult, experienced mentor in the classroom. Additionally, teachers put as much time and care into teaching children how to learn as what to learn. They teach processes and content simultaneously.
Beliefs that Underpin this Inquiry
We begin planning on paper by reflecting on the beliefs we want to underpin a particular inquiry. It makes a genuine difference when we begin planning by articulating belief statements. By doing so we can check our plans for implementation against our beliefs to ensure theory–practice continuity. We have also found the process promotes our own growth and change as teachers. When we name our beliefs we make it possible to be more deliberate about living into them with our students day in and day out.

Possibilities for Planning Out of Guiding Questions
Next, we generate guiding questions. See the set of possible guiding questions on the last page of the template. The list of questions is provided not as a mandate, rather it is intended to stimulate a range of possibilities. For instance, we have found conceptual questions around diversity, democracy, systems, balance, cycles, change, and voice incredibly powerful. Pragmatic questions help students get underneath the surface to consider how the knowledge under study was generated and the tentative nature of knowledge in general. Of course it is critical to urge students to pose personal questions like: Why does it matter to me? And social questions like: Why does it matter in the world? And finally, we want students to develop a habit of posing questions that promote social action. Questions such as: So what? And now what? How might we make the world a better place by taking action on what we have learned?

Different units of study call for different kinds of questions as illustrated in chapter three. The questions we ask influence what we see. Guiding questions help teachers and students see the world in new ways.
Possible method(s)/ investigation(s) that will promote authentic inquiry: How might students learn the skillfulness of inquiry?

Given the questions posed, would observations, interviews, experiments, surveys, controlled studies, or other methods best support this inquiry?

Students learn best when we teach the skillfulness of inquiry authentically, across contexts and over time. Therefore, it helps to sketch out possible methods of investigation that will promote content learning and teach the skillfulness of inquiry at the same time.

We want our students to learn how to make careful observations, conduct interviews, design surveys, experiments and controlled studies. We want them to do more than learn vicariously. We want them to have first-hand opportunities to investigate, collect and interpret qualitative and quantitative data; to learn when to access primary and secondary sources; to think and analyze complex issues for themselves. This feature of the template reminds us to engage students in the processes of inquiry during each unit of study.

Key demonstrations and engagements throughout the inquiry

What are the primary teaching and learning strategies to be employed?

It helps to brainstorm a list of possible demonstrations and engagements, when envisioning the unit as a whole. These bulleted lists remind us of the various strategies we might use as we move from big-picture unit planning to daily and weekly plans. The words demonstration and engagement were chosen deliberately. Demonstrations are intended to “show” students how or what to learn while “engagements” offer students direct opportunities to try the process or idea on for themselves. We strive for a healthy balance of demonstrations and engagements across units.
**NARRATIVE 3: Planning Units of Study: Using a Unit Template**

*Envisioning a possible touchstone experience*

*Given the key demonstrations and engagements planned, which one might best serve as a touchstone experience?*

Just as touchstone texts are accessed throughout units of study in reading and writing workshop and revisited over and over again to deepen and broaden literacy learning, touchstone experiences are foundational to units of study in the sciences and social sciences. Touchstone experiences such as field studies, visiting, collecting and analyzing water samples from a pond, science experiments, interviewing an elder from the community, interpreting relics from the past, etc. are most powerful when we visit and revisit them across a unit of study, each time noticing more, shifting perspectives or going deeper.

*Strategies, skills, content and/or concepts to be addressed throughout demonstrations, engagements and touchstone experiences*

*How might standards be uncovered through this inquiry?*

We strongly believe that our best teaching moves grow out of uncovering not simply covering the standards. We envision authentic, meaningful possibilities for teaching and learning when planning on paper then access the standards to consider and document how they might be uncovered in authentic ways. Some teachers prefer to cut and paste the official standards directly into the template while others translate the standards into their own words for efficiency and clarity. Because units are interdisciplinary, multiple disciplines are addressed when listing standards. After generating the standards that will naturally be embedded in a unit, you can identify gaps and plan additional engagements to fill the voids.
**Possible strategies for reflecting on and documenting our learning?**
*How might we demonstrate growth and change? What are our new questions?*

Clearly questions play a key role in our planning because questions guide our thinking. Questions also promote professional reflection around assessment possibilities. We wonder how we might have our students demonstrate their growth and change? We also build in opportunities for our students to document their new questions at the end of a study. To promote genuine inquiry, we ask our students to pose new questions. The more we know the better our questions. We believe students should ask better questions at the end of the study than they do at its inception.

**Reflexivity: Studying ourselves and the implementation of this unit of study to grow and change.**

*How did it go? What do we want to hold onto? What do we want to revise?*

Finally, finally, finally . . . as we draw closure to a unit of study, we ask questions of ourselves. We do so because we believe that professional growth best occurs reflexively. We study ourselves by reflecting on the implementation of the unit. We ask questions such as: How did it go? What do we want to hold onto? What do we want to revise? Too often we forget specific insights or challenges from year to year. When we reflect while the unit is fresh in our minds, we are more likely to capture important ideas that will lead to the development of stronger units in the future. Additionally, our responses to these questions often lead to new insights about teaching and learning in general, regardless of the unit of study. Inquiry into teaching promotes professional growth and change.
**NARRATIVE 3: Planning Units of Study: Using a Unit Template**

*Possible data sources (primary and secondary) to support this inquiry: Envisioning text sets with books, videos and artifacts, etc.*

We strive to build text sets around books, videos and artifacts so that children might learn how to learn from both primary and secondary sources. Carefully constructed lists of online, print and primary source documents, make it possible to construct comprehensive text sets of valuable resources. Some teachers categorize their lists and make notes about how they use resources while others simply create lists. These lists can be used by school media specialists to put text sets together for teachers in preparation for a new unit of study. These lists are often updated from year to year.