

# Why Teachers Shouldn't Have to Submit Lesson Plans



I'll never forget my first few weeks teaching. I had one of those old paper planners, complete with each day of the week and the different subjects I'd teach. I was so excited for my first few weeks as a real teacher that I planned the entire first two weeks ahead of time, writing every detail in my finest cursive.

About an hour into my first day, I realized I was going to have to change everything. What I had planned was not only unrealistic, I also never stood a chance at sticking to plans two weeks out. I quickly learned the unpredictability of teaching; from unexpected interruptions to the serendipity of students' questions and comments, it was nearly impossible to stick to my initial lesson plans.

Anyone who has ever spent even one day teaching in a classroom knows what I mean: plans change. They have to. Teaching is unpredictable and uncertain, especially when 20

or more human beings are along for this ride we call learning, steering the ship with their questions, emotions, and thoughts.

Even though we know it to be true that things rarely go as planned in our classrooms, administrators and school boards continue to request that teachers submit lesson plans—in some extreme cases, an entire year in advance. Don't get me wrong: It's reasonable for administrators and families to push for pedagogical transparency. After all, they have a stake in this, too, and they want to know what kids are learning, how they are progressing, and how to support learners. But requiring teachers to submit lesson plans isn't the right move. Here's why.

## **1. Administrators Don't Have Time to Read Lesson Plans**

Based on my experience, it seems pretty unlikely that administrators have time to look through hundreds of lesson plans each week. In fact, many teachers have told me that they either submit plans that lack meaning or recycle plans from years past. To be clear, it's not that these teachers don't care about their lesson planning; it's that they often prioritize other responsibilities that are more likely to lead to fruitful student learning, like assessing work, preparing for small group instruction, or speaking with parents, counselors, or other teachers who support students in their classes.

It begs the question: If the lesson plans teachers are submitting aren't helping them support students and if administrators don't have time to review all these lesson plans, is submitting lesson plans really a means to pedagogical transparency? Or is it just creating meaningless work for teachers, in the name of superficial accountability?

Instead of asking teachers to submit daily lesson plans, administrators could create a school website that houses unit plans. This approach would encourage schools to plan using backward design, a strategy that starts with the desired outcomes and works backward to plan instruction. This approach ensures that teaching is purposeful and aligned with learning goals. Schools should provide training in backward design as it benefits all teachers. By creating a common space for housing lesson plans, everyone gains insight into curriculum implementation schoolwide. Other grade-level or subject-area teachers can see what their colleagues are teaching, creating opportunities for fruitful conversations about curriculum. This system would also provide administrators the pedagogical transparency they're looking for, so they can speak to the curriculum when talking with families.

## **2. Traditional Lesson Planning Can Be Cumbersome and Unsustainable**

I don't know many teachers who have the capacity to write five or more quality lesson plans every day. In fact, those of us who have been teaching for a while often have simple instructional frameworks we use to plan and implement instruction sustainably. Some pull from foundational resources provided by the school district (most of which already have lesson plans written in them), and only write lesson plans when trying something new or complicated.

When I'm planning for instruction, I use my [five-question lesson plan](#):

- What do I hope students will leave knowing or being able to do?
- How will I know if students understand or have learned how to do this?
- What instructional resource will I use to provoke curiosity and discussion?
- How will I facilitate instruction?
- How will learners reflect on the lesson?

While this can be translated into a template, this can also be done mentally if teachers are in a pinch and need a last-minute lesson. I'd recommend embedding the five-question into a unit plan, with each day in the learning sequence answering these five questions briefly, assuming plans are written out. This is also more user-friendly for teachers from other grade levels or administrators who are curious about what others are teaching.

### **3. It Makes Teachers Feel Controlled and Micromanaged**

While some might say ensuring quality instruction is more important than catering to teachers who feel micromanaged, I disagree. Teachers' attitudes about their jobs will impact their ability to deliver quality instruction to kids. What's more, teachers deserve dignity and respect; they deserve to be treated as professionals. Forcing them to submit lesson plans that most administrators won't even open sends a clear message: we don't trust you.

Instead, when possible, administrators should join planning meetings and engage in the process of backward design with their teachers. Not only will this provide insight into curriculum development, current teaching strategies, and assessment practices, it will also help administrators walk in teachers' shoes, witnessing just how many factors they must consider when planning, and how much previous plans have already been adjusted based on results of instruction. Most of all, this approach will build trust and camaraderie among teachers, coaches, and administrators. After all, if we are truly "all in this together," then administrators and coaches should be sharing in the energy demands of planning and preparing for instruction.

This goes for new teachers, too. Having new teachers submit lesson plans does not actually teach them how to effectively plan lessons. It's similar to how having students fill out a worksheet doesn't actually teach them; it simply shows their ability to fill in boxes. If you want to teach new teachers how to plan, pair them with a coach, participate in their planning meetings, and then use the effectiveness of their instruction as a litmus test for how well their planning is going.

## **Cultivating the Conditions for Teacher Agency**

Quality instruction matters, and it's true there is a relationship between the quality of planning practices and the quality of instruction. That said, the costs of having teachers submit lesson plans to the principal outweigh the benefits. We want teachers to feel trusted, valued, and dignified, in part because it's just the right thing to do, but also because it's best for kids. After all, when kids have teachers who feel heard and valued,

those teachers will be more likely to exercise their agency to reach as many kids as possible in creative and innovative ways.

As administrators plan for the fall, they should consider one of these alternatives for increasing pedagogical transparency. Hopefully, this will create the best of both worlds: teachers won't feel micromanaged, and leaders will have more awareness about what teachers are teaching.