

Learning-Activity Planning Rubric

Dimension	1	2	3	4
Alignment to Standards	Barely aligned or not aligned	Somewhat aligned	Mostly aligned	Completely aligned
Impact on Learning	Low impact	Medium-low impact	Medium-high impact	High impact
Student Engagement	Low engagement for most students	Moderate engagement for some students	Moderate engagement for most students	High engagement for most students
Depth of Knowledge Level	Recall	Skill/concept	Strategic reasoning	Extended reasoning
Technology Integration	No integration of technology	Some integration of technology	Effective and prominent integration of technology	Effective and innovative integration of technology
Teacher Friendliness		High-maintenance (lots of materials and prep work)	Low-maintenance (few materials or little prep work)	
Rigor and Relevance	Teacher works	Students work	Students think	Students think and work
Differentiation	Not suited for differentiation	Suited for differentiation with fairly significant modifications	Well suited for differentiation with minor modifications	Well suited for differentiation as is, with natural tiers built in
Time-Benefit Analysis	Too much instructional time required for relatively little learning	Questionable amount of time required for expected amount of learning	Amount of time required and amount of learning are commensurate	Small amount of time required for amount of learning that exceeds expectations
Connections	No connections to previous or future standards or to other subjects	A few genuine connections to other standards or subjects	Genuine connections to other standards and/or subjects embedded in various components	Strong, authentic connections to previous and future standards and to other subjects

Source: Venables, D. (2018). *Facilitating teacher teams and authentic PLCs: The human side of leading people, protocols, and practices*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Copyright © 2013–2017 by Daniel R. Venables.

The Dimensions of the Planning Protocol Rubric

Each dimension of the Planning Protocol Rubric identifies an important characteristic for a lesson component or activity we are considering using with students. A rundown of these dimensions follows.

Alignment to standards. Most teachers would probably agree that if an activity or a lesson component is not aligned to the content standards to which the school or district adheres, it forfeits consideration for implementation, however rich or effective it might be. This is the unfortunate reality in schools today. If an activity is at least partially aligned to standards, questions to consider include *Which component of this lesson best aligns to the standards? Why? What do we think mastery looks like for these standards?*

Impact on learning. After alignment to standards, this is the most important dimension. If I had had a rubric in my early teaching years that forced me to analyze the extent to which “flashy poster” projects facilitated or exhibited authentic learning, I suspect it wouldn’t have taken me four years to hit the pause button and rethink such assignments. Although the scoring of this dimension is subjective, teachers can call upon their experience and expertise to speculate how effective they believe the activity will be in terms of student learning. Questions to consider include *How much learning is likely to result from this activity or lesson component? Is the gain significant? Does the activity or component work more effectively for one student group or another? Why?*

Student engagement. Again, there is no “rubric within the rubric” to score this dimension; even teachers with little experience can predict with reasonable accuracy how

engaging an activity stands to be with their students.

Depth of Knowledge level. This dimension refers to Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Levels (see Webb, Alt, Ely, & Vesperman, 2005), which categorize tasks according to the complexity of thinking they require. Questions to consider include *Are students being pushed (and guided) to think on a high level? How do we know? Which component(s) of this lesson push(es) deeper thinking?*

Technology integration. In an era of readying students to function at high levels in the 21st century, it would be remiss to imagine implementing a new lesson component or activity without considering the extent to which it incorporates technology. That’s not to say lessons should shoehorn in technology just for the sake of including it. But it is prudent to consider questions like *Can students produce a digital product to meet the requirements? How can the use of apps enhance this activity or lesson? Does this lesson overlook opportunities to capitalize on technological tools? Would technology enhance or detract from student learning here?*

Teacher friendliness. I included this rubric dimension because teachers are very busy people, so the time they spend constructing or compiling physical or digital components of a lesson is relevant. There are only two scoring options—high-maintenance and low-maintenance—to reflect that this dimension is easily scored and not quite as important as other dimensions. The “high-maintenance” score applies to activities or lessons that require considerable prep work (e.g., gathering materials, cutting out components, or loading apps on devices),

whereas “low-maintenance” refers to activities with less prep. To be clear, lessons or activities that score high on other dimensions should never be ruled out simply because they may be high-maintenance for teachers. Teacher friendliness is one aspect for consideration, but it’s by no means a deciding aspect.

Rigor and relevance. It is possible for a lesson or an activity to have a significant impact on student learning without being rigorous. This dimension prompts a conversation about the level of work and thought that the activity requires from students. Questions to ponder include *Who is doing the thinking here—the teacher or the students? Who is asking the questions—the teacher or the students? How much of this lesson or activity is about students doing rather than thinking? Has the teacher done all the work for the students ahead of time, so the lesson or activity is reduced to a figurative “fill-in-the-blanks”? Is the lesson or activity overly prescriptive, or does it allow students to make choices and decisions?*

It is worth noting that some lessons or activities are not intended to be rigorous but, rather, aim to achieve a different goal, such as reinforcing a skill or teaching vocabulary. If this is the intention, then it may be appropriate for the activity to be less rigorous and more straightforward.

Differentiation. This dimension, which wasn’t part of the original rubric that appears in *How Teachers Can Turn Data into Action* (Venables, 2014), was added at the request of teachers using the rubric in the field. The differentiation dimension compels the PLC to be mindful of the need to differentiate instruction in almost every lesson. Scoring a potential lesson or activity against

this dimension raises awareness of this important aspect of good lesson design. Questions to think about include *Could this lesson or activity be better differentiated? Where? How? Does it lend itself to tiered experiences for diverse students? Is there something about this particular lesson component that should be one-size-fits-all? If the activity scores low on this dimension, is it easily fixable?*

Time-benefit analysis. This dimension forces the team to assess the time investment required against the likely learning gains in using the activity or lesson component. Questions to consider include *Is the amount (and quality) of learning that is likely to result commensurate with the time required (e.g., number of class periods)? If not, and substantive learning is nevertheless likely, can the amount of time required be trimmed without compromising that learning?*

Connections. This dimension was added to encourage PLCs to consider the degree to which the activity or lesson component produces learning that is not isolated but, rather, connects to previous and subsequent learning as well as to subject areas outside the course curriculum. Questions to think about include *Does this activity or lesson component produce learning in isolation? Does it connect to other subject areas (e.g., a probability activity that uses voting as its context, or a social studies activity that has students write a letter to local politicians that dovetails with an English language arts standard on writing persuasive essays)?*

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