

## **PDIG PD40339 Final Report: Literacy & Backwards Design**

### **Project Description:**

The project, aimed at enhancing literacy instruction by developing units that reflected current evidence-based instructional practices, such as explicit instruction and backwards design (Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J., 1998, 2005, 2011), succeeded at developing ready-to-use unit plans. Special care was taken to ensure that content, instruction, and assessment were directly related to the identified goals and objects of the unit. Early in the launching of the project, a decision was made to incorporate Indigenous texts to the unit plans. Teachers selected books that facilitated reaching the objectives they had identified through the lens or context of their selected story. Despite facing unforeseen challenges, adaptability and teamwork facilitated completion of a project that the team is proud of, resulting in the reported professional gains made through the teachers' participation. A brief overview of the content reviewed in each section follows. This contextualizes the learning process of the teachers as they developed the nuanced, but essential, planning skills that contributed to their unit plans. The unit plans, which provide targeted overviews of units related to literacy instruction within the context of ELA and/or FLS, are included as resources for the English Educational Community.

**Session 1 (September 26, 2023):** The project commenced with an insightful exploration of goal types and objectives including: curriculum-specific goals, transfer goals, meaning-making goals, and acquisition goals. There was an emphasis on the importance of thoughtful planning and clearly defined learning objectives. Teachers engaged in a jigsaw activity, reflecting on past professional development projects related to literacy. This session activated their prior knowledge associated to literacy instruction and laid a strong foundation for understanding the principles of backwards design and its application in unit planning.

**Session 2 (November 28, 2023):** Despite facing challenges of the unexpected absence of a consultant, this session deepened teachers' understanding of backwards design. They learned about developing authentic summative evaluations and tasks, rooted in the goals identified in the planning stages. The session also focused on word knowledge and vocabulary development, providing practical strategies for supporting students' literacy development.

**Session 3 (January 31, 2024):** Although attendance was lower than expected due to the need for rescheduling after the teacher strike, and previous other commitments from some of the participants, this session revisited key points from the previous sessions and delved into the final stage of backwards design: lesson sequencing. Teachers learned to select and sequence learning events, ensuring alignment with instructional goals and assessment strategies. They were also introduced to the 'WHERE TO' planning technique, enhancing their ability to tailor instruction to diverse learner needs. Teachers also received training and the opportunity to explore various AI-driven tools that could be used, or consulted, as a way to support instructional planning and resource development.

**Session 4 (March 18, 2024):** This final full-group session provided a comprehensive review of backwards design and the explicit instruction of reading. Teachers had the opportunity to refine their unit plans, incorporating all aspects of the planning process. Despite the permanent absence of one participant and a consultant, the remaining participants collaborated effectively to finalize their unit plans,

demonstrating a high level of understanding and application of the principles learned throughout the project.

**Individualized Follow-up Sessions (spanning March 28-April 23):** Teachers collaborated independently to finalize their unit plans, ensuring alignment with project goals and incorporating feedback from peers and consultants.

**Project Goals & Outcomes:**

Information was gathered from participants at the end of the project to measure their perception of self and associated learning. Participating teachers perceived significant gains in their familiarity with backwards design, literacy instruction, and explicit instruction. They reported that the workshops improved their familiarity with backwards design (average rating of 4.5 out of 5), literacy instruction/science of reading (average rating of 4.8 out of 5), and explicit instruction (average rating of 4.6 out of 5). Additionally, teachers expressed a high level of confidence in providing their unit plans to other teachers looking to reach the same objectives (average rating of 4.8 out of 5).

The project experienced two leaves of absence that led to participation withdrawal: a teacher participant and a pedagogical consultant who ultimately took early retirement. Despite these challenges, the project successfully achieved its goals (reviewing backward design, introducing the Science of Reading, identifying learning targets/goals for each competency, and selecting a theme), and demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative professional development in enhancing teachers' literacy instruction practices.

**Reinvestment:**

The evidence-based resources developed during the project, combined with the expertise gained by the participants, can greatly benefit the educational community at large, providing access to units that reflect evidence-based practices that are aligned to curriculum outcomes. It should be noted that act of collaborating and completing a unit plan that is carefully thought out and structured in the way that this project's goals were oriented, provided the platform for the teachers to develop their expertise in this approach. Their products can serve as models or ready-to-use models for other teachers, but if teachers are interested in mastering this approach, they are encouraged to develop original units following the steps outlined by backwards design and approaches to explicit instruction.

The hope is that by sharing these units with the greater community, it can enhance teacher understanding of planning for literacy instruction and ultimately improve student achievement in reading, writing, and the use of talk.

Respectfully submitted,

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