Standards-in-Action

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION

Innovations for
Standards-Based Education

INNOVATIONS FOR STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

Standards-in-Action: Innovations for Standards-Based Education

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November 2009

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Introduction

The Standards-in-Action (SIA) innovations are new materials and methods that support the implementation of content standards in adult education classrooms. They were developed for adult education program administrators and instructors with guidance from adult educators from around the country.

For standards-based education reform to succeed, instructors first and foremost must clearly understand the intent of the standards—what knowledge and skills are to be taught and learned. If instructors do not understand the standards fully, they are unlikely to be able to make them clear to students. And if standards are not clear and well defined, it is unlikely students will attain them.

The SIA innovations encourage instructors to address standards as part of a learning community. These materials and methods combine learning-by-doing with finding the best ways to implement standards. Besides increasing instructors' understanding and ownership of the standards, the innovations result in a series of standards-based products that illuminate the standards further for instructors who are wrestling with ways to align their classroom instruction and assessments with standards.

How do the SIA innovations support standards-based education?

Standards-based education offers an overarching vision of educational progress rooted in three crucial interlocking elements: the standards themselves, teaching to the standards, and accountability. Each is essential to the success of standards-based education, and a closer look reveals that—like a three-legged stool—no one element can stand alone without the other two for stability and support.

The starting point and first leg of standards-based education is the standards themselves, which offer measurable objectives on which instructors can base their curricula. Clear standards allow educators to understand where to direct their energies and give shape to the program as a whole. Once standards have been adopted, instructors must use the standards to fashion curriculum and lessons that actually will transfer the content of the standards to students. Development of classroom activities, assignments, and, of course, a range of formative and summative assessments—the second leg—all contribute to determining whether students are absorbing the essential skills and knowledge that standards-based education aims to impart. The third and final leg is accountability: fashioning systems where instructors and programs hold themselves accountable for student attainment of proficiency according to the standards and creating innovative solutions when performance falls short of the mark.

Building on past efforts by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) to promote state-level institutionalization of adult education content standards,[1] the SIA innovations are directed at the crucial intersection where standards meet classroom instruction.

Why were the SIA materials created?

In recent years, many states have adopted adult education standards to guide educators in providing outstanding instruction to students. For standards-based reforms to take hold in adult education programs, however, instructors must become full and active partners in transforming their classrooms for the twenty-first century. The SIA methods and materials give adult educators at all levels the support

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[1] OVAE's earlier efforts included the development of technical assistance to states, *A Process Guide for Establishing State Adult Education Content Standards* (http://www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov/howto.asp) and the Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse (http://www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov/default.asp).

and encouragement they need to take state standards off the shelf and put them to use for students—literally making them *standards in action.*

What process was used to produce the SIA materials?

OVAE produced the SIA innovations through a contract with MPR Associates, Inc. OVAE conducted two pilot projects with eight states to test the SIA methods and materials from 2006–2009. The eight states were: Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas, and Virginia.

Each team included state staff and local program administrators representing large and small programs in rural and urban areas that serve a broad range of adult students (in some cases, teams also included lead instructors). Programs offered one or more of the following types of services: adult basic education, GED preparation and other adult secondary education, and English language acquisition.[2] During the pilot, teams were introduced to the SIA innovations in a series of institutes where they learned to implement the innovations. Following the institutes, teams returned to their states and worked with a standards coach to introduce the SIA innovations to their program staff. After implementing each SIA unit, team members and coaches provided feedback and made suggestions for improving the materials. Project staff gathered their input by communicating regularly with coaches, hosting project-wide conference calls, conducting site visits, and holding focus groups. The SIA materials were revised, as appropriate, in response to feedback from the pilot sites as well as insights gained throughout the project.

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[2] While the SIA innovations were used by the pilot states to support standards in reading, mathematics, and English language acquisition, the materials are not content-based and can be used in other subject areas as well.

What do the SIA units address and how do they fit together?

Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach, teaches adult educators how to discover the actual demands of each standard—the knowledge and skills to be taught and learned—by "unpacking," or pulling apart, each standard into its components. Guided by the results of the unpacking efforts, this unit addresses how to develop sample instructional activities and to select instructional resources that tightly align to the standards to achieve the goal of building an even deeper understanding of the standards.

Unit 2, Translating Standards into Curriculum: The Lead-Standards Approach, builds on the work of Unit 1 by providing adult educators with a range of strategies. These strategies can help instructors avoid the common pitfalls of simply going through the standards one-by-one or dividing the standards among the number of instructional days, without regard to the varying learning demands of each standard. This unit also teaches adult educators how to conduct Lesson Studies to examine and hone lessons with their peers.

Unit 3, Focus on Assignments: Working Together to Improve Teaching and Learning, concentrates on the actual assignments instructors are asking students to complete. It focuses on closing potential gaps between standards and classroom instruction—between what students *are* learning and doing and what they *need* to learn and do to meet the standards. Focusing on potential gaps between assignments and standards helps staff to develop a deeper understanding of the challenging work demanded by a set of standards, matching the cognitive and conceptual demands of those standards to the assignment.

Unit 4, Observing Standards-in-Action, extends the work of Unit 3 naturally by asking administrators to observe classrooms—from conducting lessons to giving assessments—to identify the prevalent standards-based teaching practices in a program and to target areas for improvement. When findings from visits to every classroom within a program are analyzed, a clear picture of standards-based instruction emerges allowing administrators to address the professional development needs of an entire faculty more effectively—potentially by moving full circle back through one or more of the SIA innovations tackled in earlier units.

How the Four SIA Units Fit Together

2

Translating Standards into Curriculum: The Lead-Standards Approach

3

Focus on Assignments: Working Together to Improve Teaching and Learning

1

Understanding the Standards We Teach

Observing Standards-in-Action

4

Start here and work your way through the units.

Then revisit units to respond to identified professional development needs of staff.
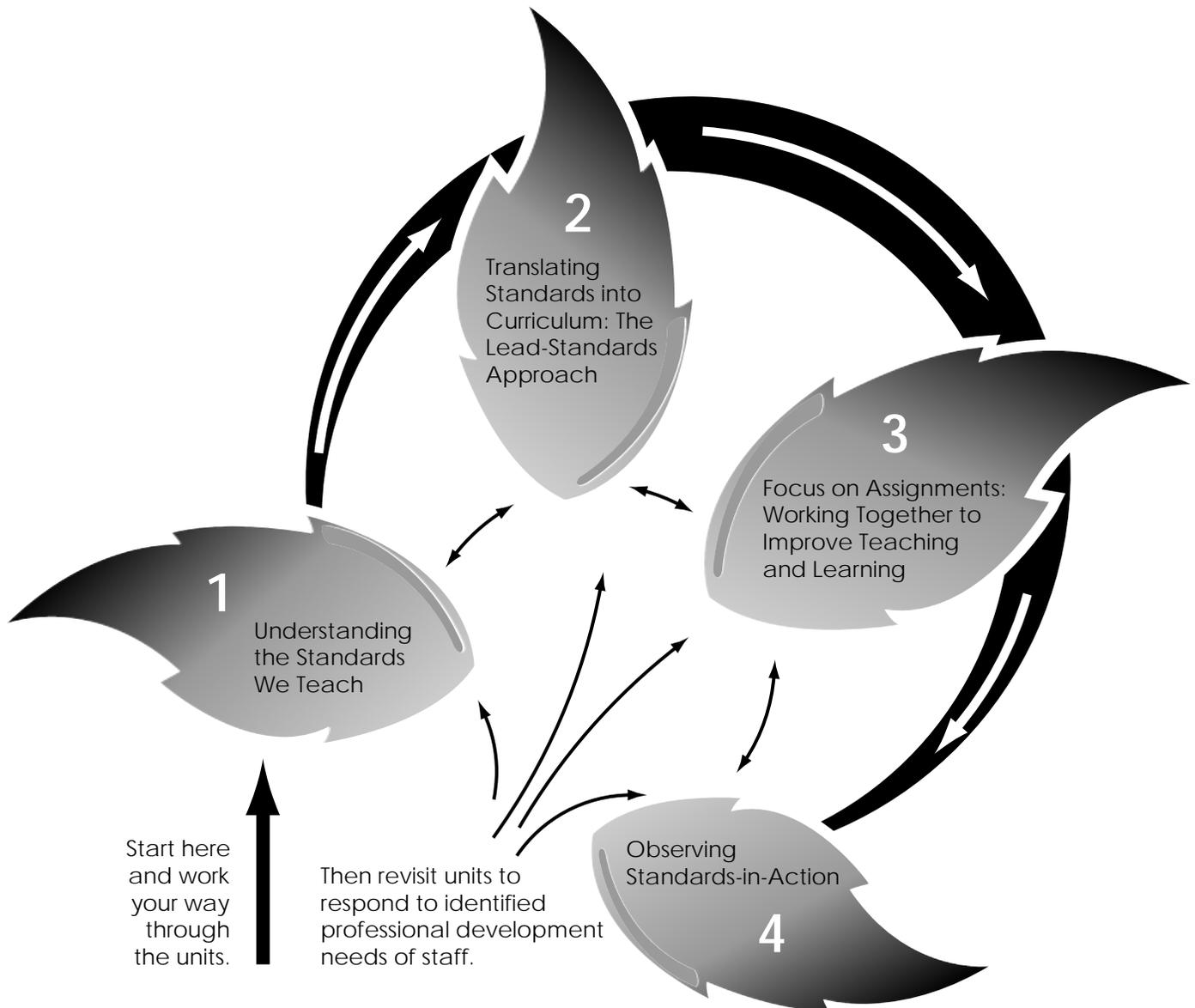
What outcomes can be achieved by implementing the SIA innovations?

By employing the SIA innovations:

- Adult educators become active members of a learning community concerned with the implementation of standards. Staff gain a common understanding of the challenges involved in implementing state standards.

- Staff learn to align curriculum, texts, and other resources to the standards.

- Programs create standards-based instructional resources designed to engage instructors and students with the most important ideas, questions, and skills related to the standards.

- Administrators and instructors become bona fide partners by jointly identifying professional development priorities and program improvement strategies.

What is required to implement the SIA innovations?

The SIA innovations require an ongoing investment of time by instructors, program administrators, state staff, and professional development staff. To implement the SIA innovations, states need content standards (draft or approved), a strong commitment to standards-based education, and a willingness to provide ongoing, active support to local programs in their use of the SIA innovations. Administrators and instructors working in local programs also need to understand the time and resources required to benefit from using the SIA innovations. Special consideration should be given to

facilitating participation, through paid release time and other incentives like professional development credits, awards, and recognition.

How is each SIA unit organized?

Each of the four units includes a similar set of features:

Background and Purpose. Presents the origin and rationale for each innovation.

Overview. Previews what each unit covers, the basic steps, and the expected outcomes.

Materials: What You Need to Begin. Lists the resources needed to implement the innovation.

Timeframe to Complete the Process. Suggests the approximate amount of time needed to prepare for and implement each innovation.

Directions for Implementation. Provides guidelines and details the steps needed to implement each innovation.

Reflections: Thinking Back and Looking Forward. Frames questions to reflect on and discuss the unit's activities.

References. Lists resources used to develop each of the four units.

Appendixes. Includes the charts, templates, examples, and other resource materials that guide the use of each innovation.

Standards-in-Action

INNOVATIONS FOR STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

1 | UNDERSTANDING THE STANDARDS WE TEACH

Contents

Background and Purpose

In implementing standards, the first priority is to make sure instructors clearly understand the meaning and intent of the standards—what knowledge and skills are to be taught and learned.

…if standards are not taught in a clear and well-defined manner, it is unlikely that students will attain them.

Too often, instructors are simply handed a set of standards and confined to their classrooms without opportunities for inquiry, reflection, and collaboration with their colleagues about how to use the standards and what the outcomes should be. If instructors do not understand the standards fully, they are unlikely to be able to make them clear to students. And if standards are not taught in a clear and well-defined manner, it is unlikely that students will attain them. The purpose of this unit is to give instructors the opportunity, as part of a learning community, to delve into the meaning of standards through three concrete action steps.

Step 1: Unpacking the Components of Standards

This action step teaches instructors how to "unpack" the content and skills demands in standards[1] and then design a set of sample teaching activities to match those demands. Based on the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, who pioneered *Understanding by Design (UbD)* (2005), unpacking standards uses an instructional model to identify the level of thinking—the cognitive demand—for each standard. Too often instructors concentrate on the content of a standard and overlook the level of thinking needed, to the detriment of student learning. Taking into account the level of thinking needed to meet the standard enables staff

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[1] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, or benchmarks.

to make choices about how best to align both instruction and assessment.

Step 2: Aligning Resources to Standards

This action step, inspired by Deborah Wahlstrom's *Using Data to Improve Student Achievement* (2002), allows instructors to verify alignment of their instructional resources to the standards. For many instructors, the commercially produced textbooks and resources they use are the default curriculum. Therefore, it is crucial for them to understand how tightly aligned those resources are to the standards.

> Before Standards-in-Action, our training focused on the purpose and usefulness of the standards. Now training is about what the standards *are* and how to implement them in instruction. We found *Unpacking the Standards* to be a good addition to the training. It gives a life to the standards."
>
> *Karen Gianninoto*
> *SIA State Liaison*
> *Maryland*

Publishers of resource series often provide "alignment reports" that claim comprehensive coverage of a set of standards, but their financial interest can obscure objective judgment. Instructors who know the standards and whose judgment is unencumbered by any monetary interests are best able to assess textbooks and other materials through independent "resources-to-standard alignment analyses." Examinations by classroom instructors or other professionals in the field often show that publishers' alignment reports do not match their claims of close alignment. It is unlikely that an instructional resource—regardless of how good or well respected it is—fully aligns to every single standard. Instructors and programs need to know where the gaps are in their current materials so they can fill them appropriately with other resources.

Step 3: Completing Materials for Instructional Use

Both the Unpacking action step and the Aligning Resources action step result in the development of standards-based products that offer concrete help to instructors as they continue to align their teaching with standards. Completed Unpacking and Resources charts can serve as guides to

instructors as they work to build well-defined standards-based lessons and relevant assignments for their students.

By engaging in these action steps, instructors increase their understanding and ownership of the standards. They will also learn the skill of unpacking standards and aligning resources that they can put to use throughout their careers as they continue to plan and implement instruction that fully covers the standards.

Overview

> 66 I have a greater understanding and appreciation of the benchmarks. If I face a standard I don't understand, I use the unpacking process again. That leads to quality lesson plans. I wish I had these tools to use when I was a K–12 teacher."
>
> *Mary Popp*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Louisiana*

Understanding the Standards We Teach begins by teaching instructors how to unpack, or take apart, each standard and divide it into its component parts: content, skills, and the context in which these content and skills are to be used. By parsing each standard, instructors can think anew about how the standards correlate to the revised Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Anderson et al. 2001; Forehand 2005), Marzano's *Dimensions of Learning* (1997), or other taxonomies for learning. Understanding a standard's level of cognitive demand enables instructors to make informed choices about the best strategies for helping students meet standards. It also enables them to determine whether teaching should focus on lower-order (e.g., identify, recognize) thinking objectives or higher-order (e.g., differentiate, synthesize) cognitive processes. In addition, the Unpacking action step helps staff address how best to:

- Maintain the focus on teaching the right content and skills.
- Target curriculum and instruction to the right level of complexity.
- Support shared professional learning and common expectations for students.

After each standard is unpacked, instructors put their understanding to work immediately. They develop a sample activity directly reflecting the unpacked content and skills, describing a real-life activity meaningful to students, and targeting the right level of complexity for a given cognitive demand. Pulled together as a program resource, these sample activities can spark lively and relevant instruction and lessons that stimulate student interest and learning.

With standards fresh in the minds of instructors from Unpacking the Components of Standards, the next step allows staff to answer an important question: Are the program-wide and commercially produced resources they use tightly aligned to standards? In other words, do they support the teaching of standards? Instructors identify specific chapters and pages in textbooks or other resources that address a standard and then determine the extent to which the standard is covered. When instructors determine that the resource is only "partially aligned" or "not aligned" to a standard, they need to locate additional resources to teach to that standard.

Once completed, the resulting chart of aligned resources provides a reference for staff about how to use instructional resources with fidelity to the standards. It offers a quick way for staff new to the program to become familiar with a resource useful in teaching a particular subject and lets them know when a resource is weak or silent on specific content and must be supplemented.

Materials: What You Need to Begin

☐ Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators (pp. 20–21).

☐ State standards (one hard copy and one electronic copy for each participant).

☐ Chart for Unpacking the Components of Standards (one copy for each participant, p. 22).

☐ Revised Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Anderson et al. 2001; Forehand 2005), Marzano's *Dimensions of Learning* (1997), or another taxonomy for learning (one copy for each participant).

☐ Sample activities from other locales (one copy for each participant).

☐ Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards (p. 23).

☐ Commercially produced resources and textbooks used in your program.

Timeframe to Complete the Process

The time required to complete these action steps depends on how the work teams are organized: the number of teachers on a team, the number of standards assigned to teams or individual teachers, and the complexity of the standards. Each participating instructor could need from 10 to 32 hours to complete the three action steps in the Understanding the Standards We Teach unit.

Directions for Implementation

Step 1: Unpacking the Components of Standards—Preparation

> " In unpacking standards, we realized that we can, and do, teach higher-order thinking skills to lower-level learners."
>
> *Pam Blundell*
> *SIA State Liaison*
> *Oklahoma*

I. Both seasoned and new facilitators can review the Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators to prepare for leading the group work in this unit.

II. Think through how to divide the work and assign staff to small work teams. These activities are—and should be—shared to allow for inquiry and reflection. It is not necessary for each instructor individually to unpack each standard or align each program-wide resource to each standard. In pairs or small work groups, different instructors can unpack different standards, conferring with others as they develop sample activities.

III. Prepare the charts for Unpacking the Components of Standards (see p. 22). Enter standards electronically into the first column of the chart, so instructors don't have to type or write the standards in themselves.

IV. Next, load the charts for Unpacking the Components of Standards onto computers, so that staff can unpack standards electronically—an efficient way for them to complete this work. If computers are not available, produce copies so that instructors can unpack and align with pen and paper. Eventually, handwritten work will need to be entered electronically to produce materials for new staff to use.

V. Organize initial work sessions to allow staff concentrated periods of time—at least 2–4 hours—to work together. After instructors grasp the demands of unpacking standards, consider giving them the flexibility to continue the unpacking process by

meeting independently in their own small work groups at convenient times and places.

VI. To guide the unpacking of standards, select a classification model of different levels of thinking, such as the revised Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Anderson et al. 2001; Forehand 2005), or Marzano's *Dimensions of Learning* (1997). Choose the classification scheme that is the best fit based on the following considerations:

The learning activities should be short—just a few lines long.

● Are staff already familiar with a classification model?
● Are they using one of the models to organize learning?
● Which model best fits the program?

VII. Collect sample activities from other locales to serve as examples and resources for your teams. These will be helpful in determining the format and content of your sample activities.

VIII. Decide on the framing parameters of the sample activity statements (e.g., length, verb tense), so that teams will produce similar products. The learning activities should be short—just a few lines long.

Step 1: Unpacking the Components of Standards—Implementation

Introduce and model Unpacking the Components of Standards. Discuss the rationale for unpacking standards by reviewing the directions and chart for unpacking with participants (p. 22). Unpack one or more standards as a whole group.

Unpack standards in work groups. Provide team members with copies of the standards. Divide standards

and then assign specific standards to instructors in small work groups or pairs. Working in pairs or small groups, have instructors:

I.   Review each standard in Column 1 systematically to identify the skill demands of the standard and write them down in Column 2.

II. Identify the content or concepts related to each skill contained within each standard and enter them into Column 3.

Determining the level of thinking is a matter of interpretation and judgment and will require some reflection and discussion.

III. Indicate in Column 4 the context in which students are required to apply the skills and concepts of the standard. The context is the circumstances in which the skills and content of a particular standard should be used, for example, writing a memo, solving a problem, or reading a document. Not every standard will have a stated context. In those cases, simply leave that column blank.

IV. Use the selected taxonomy to consider all the information in Columns 2–4 to identify the level of thinking, or cognitive demand, for the standard in Column 1. Determining the level of thinking is a matter of interpretation and judgment and will require some reflection and discussion.

Confirm unpacking. Check each work group's unpacking by asking the following questions:

●   When you cover up the standard in Column 1 so you cannot see the text, do the phrases listed under content, skills, and context adequately represent and describe the standard?

●   Do the unpacked content, skills, and context contain only words actually appearing in the standard? If other

words have been added, re-write, using only words that appear in the standard.

- Is each unpacked skill linked to the appropriate unpacked content or concept?

- As you read over the unpacked content and skills, do they represent what you would really expect of a student in meeting this standard?

> "I think it is a great idea for teachers to look closely at their textbooks. Our teachers found that the textbooks were emphasizing things and doing things that they [the teachers] didn't agree with. For example, one resource included over 50 percent reading and writing activities, when the teacher wanted to focus on listening and speaking."
>
> *Eduardo Honold*
> *SIA Pilot Program*
> *Facilitator, Texas*

Design sample activities to match the unpacked standard. Once the instructors have checked, revised, and finished working through Columns 3–5, ask them to build a sample activity in Column 6 that is well aligned to the unpacked standard. Provide the following questions as a handout or post them in the room, so that instructors can use them to guide their conversation:

- For those experienced with a standard such as this, what kinds of activities have you used or seen used in the classroom to good effect?

- Think about how students might use this standard in their lives. Why is it worthwhile for students to master it? What might students do to exhibit mastery of this standard with their family, in the workplace, or in the community?

- What can be added to this activity to attract and hold students' interest?

- Are there additional concepts and skills embodied in other standards that students would need to acquire to complete this activity?

- How can this activity be described in just a few sentences?

Step 2: Aligning Resources to Standards

I.   Prepare the charts—enter standards electronically into the first column of the Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards (see p. 23), so instructors do not have to type or write the standards in themselves.

II. Next, load the forms onto computers, so that staff can align resources electronically—an efficient way for them to complete this work. If computers are not available, produce copies so that instructors can align with pen and paper. Eventually, handwritten work will need to be entered electronically to produce materials for new staff to use.

III. Determine the extent to which instructors are using common or different commercially produced resources[2] because this influences how best to organize the instructor work groups:

   ● If there are program-wide resources, staff can work together to determine the alignment of those resources to standards. The standards can be divided and assigned to various groups of instructors. If there is more than one shared resource, various resources can be assigned to different work groups. Working in pairs or small groups, staff members can check the alignment of that resource to different standards.

   ● If instructors are not using shared resources, then each instructor must align his or her resources individually.

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[2] It should be noted that all resources can be analyzed—including those developed by instructors—but it can be overwhelming to analyze every single resource.

IV. Identify samples of program-wide and commercially produced resources—print and electronic—used by instructors and ask them to bring copies to the work sessions.

Introduce resource alignment. Review the directions and the Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards (p. 23), including the meanings of *tight alignment, partial alignment,* or *no alignment.*

- *Tight Alignment:* The resource or text sufficiently supports students' mastery of the concepts and skills within the standard without the need for additional resources.

- *Partial Alignment:* The resource or text addresses the standard, but additional resources are needed to fill gaps and teach this standard well and in the necessary depth.

- *No Alignment:* The resource or text does not cover the standard at all or covers it too poorly for students to gain mastery of the standard.

Align resources in work groups. Assign batches of standards to different instructor teams. For each resource, have the teams:

I. List specific chapters and pages in the resource that support the teaching of each standard.

II. Determine whether or not the resource includes enough information to teach the standard at the right level of depth and complexity. That is, make a professional judgment about the tightness of the "fit" of the resource to the standard.

66 We were able to see the amount of information [related to standards] that was in the resources we use, and we could recommend resources to fill in the gaps."

Maureen Pitre
SIA Instructor
Louisiana

III. Write down a score under the Level of Alignment column—2 for *tight alignment*, 1 for *partial alignment*, and 0 for *no alignment*.

Confirm alignment work. Once resources have been reviewed and scored, ask the following questions:

● How many of the standards are tightly aligned to the resource or textbook? How many of the standards are partially aligned or not aligned to the resource? Do scores of 2, 1, or 0 predominate?

● Should the resource be retained? How should it be supplemented?

> *It doesn't matter how long the resource has been used or how dedicated instructors are to it. If the resource is not well aligned, it won't help students master the standards.*

♦ If a resource scores mainly 2s, seek additional resources to support the teaching of those standards in the few instances where alignment is weak.

♦ If a resource scores mainly 1s, but with some degree of tight alignment, or 2s, consider whether or not to continue using it to address a limited set of standards. If you decide not to use it, seek better resources for the remaining standards.

♦ If a resource scores mainly 0s and the rest 1s, new resources more closely aligned with standards need to be purchased or developed by your program. It does not matter how long the resource has been used or how dedicated instructors are to it. If the resource is not well aligned, it will not help students master the standards.

Develop a process to find additional resources to fill gaps. If staff are using a variety of resources, it is possible that, taken together, the combined resources have the materials and activities necessary to address all standards well.

Step 3: Completing Materials for Instructional Use

Build a reference library. Gather the work of various teams to create two sets of resources for staff use:

I.   Completed charts that unpack the conceptual and cognitive demands of the standards and provide concrete sample activities that can be used to develop standards-based lessons. (Charts for Unpacking the Standards.)

II. Charts that correlate textbooks and other resources to the standards that can guide instructors in choosing materials for instruction. (Charts for Aligning Resources to Standards.)

Review and refine completed charts. To ensure clarity, consistency, and appropriateness across the work of the various instructor teams, the administrator and facilitator or a small representative group of instructors can conduct the review.

Make charts available. Store these resources in an accessible place to enable all staff to build lessons and assessments well aligned to the standards.

Reflections: Thinking Back and Looking Forward

After completing Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach, ask instructors to reflect on and then discuss what they have learned and to think ahead about what additional professional development and materials might be needed. Below are some reflection questions to pose to instructors:

❝ Using these tools promoted a higher level of discussion around standards.”

Elizabeth Jardine
SIA State Liaison
Rhode Island

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the activities. What worked well and what could be improved?

- How has participating in Understanding the Standards We Teach changed your thinking about the state standards?

- How will you use these new methods and materials to improve your teaching practice and students' learning?

- Have you identified specific needs that could be addressed through additional professional development?

Once instructors have a firm understanding of the standards, the next priority is to make certain that instructors know how to support students in attaining the standards. This is accomplished by developing meaningful curricula with clear areas of focus in unit plans and is addressed in Unit 2, Translating Standards into Curriculum: The Lead-Standards Approach.

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Appendixes

A. Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators

B. Chart for Unpacking the Components of Standards

C. Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards

D. Sample Chart for Unpacking the Components of Standards

Standards-in-Action

Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators[3]

Preparing for the Meeting

● Design the meeting, prepare materials, and attend to logistics.

● Prepare and circulate an agenda that includes date, times (start and end), location, objectives, participants, discussion items, and estimated time for each item.

Opening the Meeting

● Welcome participants and make introductions.

● Review the meeting schedule and agenda.

● Explain the purpose and objectives of the meeting, and remind the group at key times.

● Check on participants' expectations for the meeting.

  ♦ Establish ground rules (e.g., start on time and end on time; different opinions are welcome; limit side conversations).

  ♦ Keep a "parking lot" for questions and concerns to be addressed at another time.

● Explain how things will work in the meeting, for example, any processes or procedures to be used (remaining open to adjust time, tasks, and processes, if necessary).

Facilitating Group Discussions

● Be clear about the goals of discussions with participants.

● Ask a few open-ended questions related to your topic to get the discussion going. For example:

  ♦ What do you think about the...?

  ♦ What are key issues regarding...?

  ♦ What has been your experience with…?

● Encourage participants to voice their ideas; never criticize or diminish comments.

  ♦ Ensure that all participants and ideas have a chance to be heard; encourage quiet participants to join the discussion.

● Poll the group—one-by-one—when everyone's thoughts are needed. Always offer participants the option to pass.

● Don't overreact to challenges; acknowledge the point and make adjustments, if requested and possible.

● Respond honestly to questions you can't answer and offer to find out the answer.

● Ask participants to summarize the key points of the discussion. Plan for follow-up. Keep track of follow-up action items.

● Ask participants—even if only in a brief discussion—about what they appreciated and what to do differently next time.

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[3] Adapted from Elizabeth Vasquez's *How to Facilitate Groups: A Quick Reference Handbook on Active Facilitation Techniques* (1996).

Standards-in-Action

Helping a Group Reach Consensus

● Agree on the issue to be decided, and write it on a flip chart.

● Explore the issue. Ask participants to offer their thoughts about the issue, without arguing.

● Solicit a proposal. Having heard everyone's views, ask if anyone can propose a decision.

● Refine the proposal. Ask for ideas to make the proposal more supportable.

● Ask for a show of consensus. Poll the group or ask for other indications, for example, thumbs up-thumbs sideways-thumbs down.

● Ask what it would take to turn "no" votes into "yes" votes.

● Ask for another show of consensus.

Managing Conflict in Groups

● Be sure the meeting's ground rules include something like: "It's OK to disagree" and "Express differences openly and constructively."

● Acknowledge conflicts as they emerge: "It sounds like there are two different views of this issue in the group."

● Look for common ground. Ask the group if anyone can see an opportunity for compromise.

● Identify an alternative—a third solution. Offer one or ask a sub-group to work on a proposal and bring it back to the whole group.

● Review what happens if an agreement is not reached: Will others make the decision instead of this group? Will no decision be made on an issue of importance to the group?

● Postpone the issue. Offer a cooling-off period or let enough time pass for the differences to become less relevant.

Standards-in-Action

Chart for Unpacking the Components of Standards

1 Standards	2 Skills Included in Standard	3 Concepts Included in Standard	4 Through a Particular Context	5 Cognitive Demand/ Levels of Thinking	6 Sample Activity
List the standards here—one per row.	Indicate here what skills are expected. Skills are what learners are expected to do to demonstrate mastery of the concepts and content. They are represented by the verbs in the standard. If multiple skills are included, align the concepts with the skills to which they apply. This is unnecessary if the skills listed apply equally to all concepts.	Indicate here what concepts or content are included in the standard. Concepts are the information or ideas that learners need *to know*. These generally are the nouns or noun phrases in the standard.	Indicate in which context students are required to use the standard's skills and concepts, e.g., writing an essay, solving a problem. Not every standard will have a stated context.	Using the selected taxonomy, consider all the information in Columns 2–4 to determine the "level of thinking" or cognitive demand of the standard.	Add a teaching activity that encompasses the concepts and skills of this standard and is pitched at the right level of cognitive demand.

Standards-in-Action

Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards

Determine level of alignment:	2 = Tight Alignment 1 = Partial Alignment 0 = No Alignment	Resource #1 name and publisher: Resource #2 name and publisher: Resource #3 name and publisher:

Standards	Resource #1		Resource #2		Resource #3	
	Chapter and Pages	Level of Alignment	Chapter and Pages	Level of Alignment	Chapter and Pages	Level of Alignment

Inspired by Wahlstrom, D. (2002). *Using Data to Improve Student Achievement*. Virginia Beach, VA: Successline Publications.

Standards-in-Action

Sample Chart for Unpacking the Components of Standards

1 Standards	2 Skills Included in Standard	3 Concepts Included in Standard	4 Through a Particular Context	5 Cognitive Demand/ Levels of Thinking	6 Sample Activity
(1) Describe the objective(s) of documents (e.g., graphical representations, tables, charts, forms, applications) and procedural text (e.g., manuals, directions, procedures) and analyze the text for its "user-friendliness" and graphic design.	Describe Analyze	Objectives User-friendliness Graphic design	Of documents Of procedural text	Understanding Analyzing	Students analyze a rules manual for a sport or game. They analyze the word choice and appropriateness of the writing, as well as the graphics, given the intended audience. They determine whether the stated (and unstated) objectives of the manual were satisfied.
(2) Determine the meaning of multiple-meaning words by using context.	Determine	Meaning of multiple-meaning words	Using context	Understanding	Challenge students to develop single sentences that include two different meanings of the same word. For example, "John is going to object to that object being in the room." Then ask students, working in pairs, to write riddles that include multiple-meaning words and present to class.
(3) Interpret details from text to complete tasks, solve problems, or perform procedures.	Interpret	Details (from text)	Complete tasks, solve problems, perform procedures	Understanding Applying	Students read, online or in print, and select a recipe they want to follow to produce a culinary delight. After they follow the directions and complete the task at home, they rewrite the directions so they are clear and easy for a younger chef to follow.

Standards-in-Action

INNOVATIONS FOR STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

2 | TRANSLATING STANDARDS
INTO CURRICULUM:
THE LEAD-STANDARDS
APPROACH

Contents

Background and Purpose

Since standards-based education took hold in the 1990s, educators have been searching for ways to prioritize and organize the content embedded within standards so that they can focus on the core ideas within a discipline. The first priority—addressed in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach—is ensuring that instructors are crystal-clear about the intent and meaning of the standards—that is, the knowledge and skills to be taught and learned.

> 66 This [unit] was my favorite. It got into where the rubber hits the road and what we need to think about. It was practical and worthwhile and built on what we had learned before in the Understanding Standards unit."
>
> *Apple Bazil*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Maryland*

Once instructors have a solid understanding of the standards, the next priority is to make certain they know how to support students in attaining the standards. Too often instructors teach each standard separately to ensure complete coverage of the content. This strategy has led to frustration for many instructors because the prospect of trying to cover each and every standard equally is frequently overwhelming. As a result, instructors attempting to be comprehensive run the risk of covering the content superficially.

A recently developed alternative, promoted by such education experts as Dr. Robert Marzano, the National Research Council, and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, offers educators an innovative approach to translating standards into curriculum that identifies essential areas of focus. Unit 2 of the SIA innovations, Translating Standards into Curriculum: The Lead-Standards Approach, builds on that work, using three interrelated action steps.

Step 1: Identifying Lead Standards

At the heart of this action step is the selection of a core group of "lead" standards that embody important areas of emphasis—within the larger set of standards—that can guide the development of coherent instructional units and teaching practices. Two other leaders in this effort, Larry Ainsworth and Douglas Reeves from the Center for Performance Assessment, call this subset of standards the "safety net curriculum."

Underlying the lead-standards approach is a belief that, while all standards are crucial learning outcomes, not all standards are created equal. Some—the lead standards—are useful guideposts for organizing instruction.

Identifying lead standards helps instructors to concentrate on key concepts and ideas so that student learning is focused and in-depth. Underlying the lead-standards approach is a belief that, while all standards are crucial learning outcomes, not all standards are created equal. Some—the lead standards—are useful guideposts for organizing instruction.

Step 2: Designing Coherent Units of Instruction

After identifying a set of lead standards, the next action step is to group related standards together into coherent units of study—to translate standards into curriculum. Lead standards become the organizing tool around which curricula are built. As instructors design units of study, they bundle lead standards with other standards from that content area to connect ideas that support and reinforce the teaching and learning of the lead standards. Organizing standards into curriculum units helps instructors avoid the pitfall of simply moving down the list of standards one-by-one or dividing the standards among the number of instructional days, without regard to the varying learning demands of each standard.

Step 3: Conducting Lesson Studies

Translating standards into units of instruction is a challenging process, and too often it gets short shrift in the final steps of producing lesson plans. Instead of leaving instructors to their own devices at this crucial juncture, the last action step, Conducting Lesson Studies, gives them the opportunity to share, test, and hone lessons built from the units of instruction with peers. The materials included in the last action step guide instructors concretely through a Lesson Study, a process based on the work of the Lesson Study Research Group from Teachers College at Columbia University. Lesson Studies prompt instructors to think beyond their classroom practice to the needs of the whole program. These are activities that allow instructors to stretch their teaching practice and experiment with new ideas, while developing the habit of remaining open to continuous improvement.

Translating standards into units of instruction is a challenging process, and too often it gets short shrift in the final steps of producing lesson plans.

Instructors who adopt the lead-standards approach find that it lends greater coherence and depth to their teaching. It provides clear, consistent priorities and focus while ensuring that all standards in a content area at a particular level of adult education are covered in a logical and effective manner.

Overview

Translating Standards into Curriculum begins by having instructors identify areas of emphasis and priority within the standards through the selection of lead standards. Instructors then integrate standards into coherent units centered on a set of lead standards. Finally, staff craft, test, and revise lessons based on those units.

Begin by thinking through the following central question:

> What are the essentials our students must learn for success—for this class, for important assessments during their educational career, or for life?

The initial goal is to have instructors review all of the standards and identify a subset of standards to serve as a solid backbone around which remaining standards can be linked to organize coherent units of instruction.

Some expectations will stand out because they are of a higher cognitive order or encompass other skills. Others prepare a student for the next level of study, are an enduring life skill, or have relevance beyond their domain or discipline. The initial goal is to have instructors review all of the standards and identify a subset of standards to serve as a solid backbone around which remaining standards[1] can be linked to organize coherent units of instruction. Instructors work to bundle lead standards with other standards to build on their natural connections and support and reinforce the teaching and learning of the lead standards.

Once units of instruction are developed, instructors participate in a Lesson Study, in which they work together not only to create a lesson to meet explicit instructional goals, but also to refine that lesson after one instructor teaches it to students. By observing the lesson they have crafted together, instructors can examine how students

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[1] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to define what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, or bench-marks.

Lesson Study is another example of staff development that builds on what teachers do, giving them the opportunity to learn by doing the real work of teaching in cooperative workgroups—with the added bonus of helping them to become comfortable observing and learning from one another.

think and process information during the lesson. By collecting data to confirm their findings, instructors can also determine how well students internalized the information presented during the lesson.

The benefits of Lesson Study to instructors are many. Because many observers experience the same lesson simultaneously, Lesson Study allows instructors to gain insights from one another and become more reflective about their practice. Lesson Study is another example of staff development that builds on what teachers do, giving them the opportunity to learn by doing the real work of teaching in cooperative workgroups—with the added bonus of helping them to become comfortable observing and learning from one another.

Materials: What You Need to Begin

☐ See Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach (one copy for the facilitator) (p. 20 of Unit 1).

☐ State standards (one copy for each participant).

☐ Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards (one copy for each participant, p. 30).

☐ Template for Identifying Lead Standards (one copy for each participant, p. 25).

☐ List of selected lead standards (Note: list is created during this unit; one copy for each participant).

☐ Template for Units of Instruction (one copy for each participant, p. 26).

☐ Chart for Aligning Resources to Standards (completed chart created by participants in Unit 1).

☐ Sample activities developed by participants during Unit 1 (one copy for each participant).

☐ Template for Lesson Study (one for each participant, p. 27).

☐ Template for a Lesson Plan (or your own template for lesson planning; one copy for each participant, p. 29).

☐ Key Characteristics of Effective Lessons (one copy for each participant, p. 31).

☐ Student performance data (one copy for each participant).

☐ Set of units of study developed (Note: these are developed in this unit; one copy for each participant).

Timeframe to Complete the Process

> ❝ I wanted to put the lead standards into the broader context of what people were actually teaching and doing in the classroom—for example, what is the ideal teaching mix, what percentage of time should they spend on teaching speaking, listening, writing, reading."
>
> *Eduardo Honold*
> *SIA Pilot Program*
> *Facilitator, Texas*

The time required to complete these action steps depends on how you decide to organize the work teams. For example, the amount of time instructors need to spend will depend on the number of instructors on a team, the number of lead standards assigned to each team, and the complexity of the standards. Here is some general guidance:

- Identifying lead standards with a group of seven to 10 instructors takes about 4 hours.

- Planning one or two coherent units takes about 16 hours.

- Conducting a Lesson Study requires instructors to meet several times, for a total of about 20 hours. This includes one day to create the lesson, an hour to observe, a half-day to reflect and revise the lesson, another hour to observe, and a half-day to reflect and revise the lesson yet again.

Directions for Implementation

Step 1: Identifying Lead Standards— Preparation

I.   As a refresher on group facilitation, review the Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach (p. 20 of Unit 1).

Identifying lead standards works best when someone facilitates each working group.

II.   Identifying lead standards works best when someone facilitates each working group. If you have several groups, choose multiple facilitators from leaders among your instructors. For this action step, groups can be small or as large as 20 to 30 people. The size of the group should be a function of the number of teaching staff in your program, with particular attention to the number of staff teaching a particular content area.

III.   Prepare the following materials:

   a.   Electronically enter standards into the template for Identifying Lead Standards and make copies for all participants.

   b.   Make copies of the Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards for all participants.

IV.   Organize work sessions to allow staff teaching at specific levels and areas of instruction (e.g., Adult Basic Education [ABE], Adult Secondary Education [ASE], and English Language Acquisition [ELA], etc.) to work together for a concentrated period of time. If there is only one instructor in a content area at a particular level of adult education, group instructors teaching at different levels together as a team.

Programs within a state also can work together throughout this action step.

V.   To make the work manageable, ask instructors to identify lead standards in one domain of a content area at a time. For example, some domains in mathematics might include number sense, algebra, and geometry. In ELA, these might be reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. Focusing on a single domain allows instructors to examine and understand all the standards within that domain and assess which should be lead standards.

> 66 We had a lot of controversy on what the lead standard was. We unpacked them to see which were anchors [lead standards]. People interpreted things differently. But we always came to consensus."
>
> *Maureen Pitre*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Louisiana*

VI. If your state standards do not vary by level (i.e., they do not differentiate among literacy levels, such as Beginning Basic Education, Low Intermediate Basic Education, High Intermediate Basic Education, etc.), instructors can decide either to:

a.   Choose a common core of lead standards for all levels of instruction, or

b.   Choose different sets of lead standards for each instructional level to reflect students' changing emphases as they progress through levels of learning.

Step 1: Identifying Lead Standards— Implementation[2]

Introduce the process for identifying lead standards. Discuss the reason for selecting lead standards by reviewing the Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards (p. 30) and the Template for Identifying Lead Standards (p. 25). Be sure that everyone understands that the goal is to

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[2] The steps outlined below have been adapted from the work of Larry Ainsworth and Douglas Reeves of the Center for Performance Assessment.

reach consensus on which standards qualify as lead standards. There is no need to model this process with the group before they make their selections. Once everyone understands the goal and the steps in the process, each instructor should make his or her selections of the most important content individually, without being influenced— at least initially—by others' preferences.

Rate the standards. Ask instructors to complete this task individually. Suggest that they move quickly through the standards in a domain to identify those they consider absolutely essential, *must-have* standards. If instructors find a standard that they are unsure about, have them mark it with a question mark and continue through the list of standards included in the template, returning to the questionable standard if they have time at the end.

> **Note:** Instructors should take only five minutes to complete this task. The longer instructors think about each standard, the more important each standard can seem. This may result in too many standards being marked as essential, and no priorities will emerge.

Assign points. Ask instructors to take another minute to go back through the standards to assign points on a scale of one to four for each standard. They should assign four points to standards marked as absolutely essential content, and rank standards between three and one to signify progressively less essential or *nice to know* content.

> **Note:** Assigning points after instructors have made their initial selections of *must-have* or lead standards, provides the data needed to determine the points of agreement and disagreement in the group. This also is a handy means of determining the most essential content when differences emerge among instructors.

Differences in instructors' scores often involve varying interpretations of what a particular standard means. By discussing the score, the group frequently can come to a consensus. Alternatively, simply make the top-scoring standards your set of lead standards.

Share scores. Prompt individual instructors to share their score for each standard. Where large discrepancies exist between scores, ask instructors to offer a rationale for the score, using one or more of the Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards.

> **Note:** Differences in instructors' scores often involve varying interpretations of what a particular standard means. By discussing the score, the group frequently can come to a consensus. Alternatively, simply make the top-scoring standards your set of lead standards.

Repeat the process. For each domain of the standards, repeat the scoring process.

Review the selected lead standards. Identify those standards with the top scores across the domains within a content area—no more than half the standards overall and preferably only 30–40 percent of the standards. Lead the group in an overall assessment of the selected lead standards by reviewing the "absolutely essential" selections and asking instructors to determine whether those standards represent core content for the specific adult education course. Review the standards and check for the following:

● Is there a standard representing an important life skill or another criterion that did not make the list?

● Is there a standard that is frequently tested to assess student gains that did not make the list?

● Are two or more lead standards within different domains of a content area so similar that emphasizing just one could avoid an unnecessary overlap?

Repeat the process for every level of adult education instruction. Even if the standards themselves do not

differentiate between adult levels of learning, the priorities for student learning are different. For example, a student learning how to read has different priorities than a student preparing to take the GED Tests, and the lead standards selected for both likely will differ.

Create a list of lead standards by level. Once the lead standards have been selected, create a separate list of them so instructors can use them to guide their designing coherent units of instruction in the next action step.

Step 2: Designing Coherent Units of Instruction—Preparation

I.   Prepare the following materials:

    a.   A copy of the selected lead standards for each participating instructor.

    b.   A copy of the full set of state standards for each participating instructor.

    c.   Both hard and electronic copies of the template for Units of Instruction for each participating instructor.

    d.   An electronic version of the chart for Aligning Resources to Standards from Unit 1 for each group, to serve as a resource.

    e.   Copies of sample activities developed as part of Unpacking the Components of Standards, as an additional resource for each group.

II. Decide how to organize instructors into small groups of two to four members to create units. For example, you might group instructors who have a facility with a particular domain of mathematics (e.g., algebra or

geometry). Alternatively, you could create groups of instructors with a diverse range of experience. Tightly knit working groups offer the best opportunities to confer, share, and learn from one another.

III. Decide in advance how to assign lead standards to each group, based on the content strengths each instructor brings to the group.

IV. Think through the desired size of units—in terms of time and coverage of standards. Units should be large enough to avoid missing important connections, yet small enough to encourage in-depth, focused exploration of an area of study, rather than mere coverage of the standards. A good rule of thumb is to limit each unit to covering no more than eight standards. Setting these parameters promotes consistency across groups and allows more mixing and matching of units.

Units should be large enough to avoid missing important connections, yet small enough to encourage in-depth, focused exploration of an area of study, rather than mere coverage of the standards. A good rule of thumb is to limit each unit to covering no more than eight standards.

Step 2: Designing Coherent Units of Instruction—Implementation

Introduce the process. Discuss the purpose of designing coherent units of instruction, and review the template (p. 26) with the group. Build a unit together following steps 1–8 below. See a sample of a completed unit of instruction on p. 28.

Assign lead standards to pairs or small teams of instructors. Ask instructors to use the Template for Units of Instruction to:

❝ I liked the lesson planning…I think this unit plan is more realistic, and makes more sense, and provides a longer view of how to approach a series of connected lessons, instead of just one, therefore creating a coherent whole."

Eduardo Honold
SIA Pilot Program
Facilitator, Texas

I. Place lead standard in the first column.

II. Identify *connecting standards* that support and reinforce the teaching and learning of that lead standard and place these in the second column. These should form a cluster of standards consisting of a lead standard and connecting standards.

III. Provide a rationale for the cluster—reasons why the standards connect and support one another—and place in third column.

IV. Determine whether or not to build another cluster of standards—lead standard and connecting standards—to complete the unit.

V. Give the unit a name that summarizes its direction and intent, to provide a quick sense of the unit's broader objective or instructional goal.

VI. Determine an approximate timeframe for the unit (e.g., number of class periods needed to complete it).

VII. Identify where (e.g., chapters and page numbers) in the primary textbook or other resources an instructor can find content for the unit and place in the fourth column. Review your program's completed chart for Aligning Resources to Standards.

VIII. Offer an idea or two about how the standards might come to life within a meaningful task or assignment in the fifth column. Consult the sample activities developed during Unpacking the Components of Standards to find those that are a good match or could be a good match with some refinement.

Step 3: Conducting Lesson Studies— Preparation[3]

I. Determine how many Lesson Studies you plan to conduct as a program, based on the number of staff in your program. Limit each group to five or six members, because this process involves peers observing instruction. Larger groups could unintentionally overwhelm the students during observation or disrupt the lesson.

II. Prepare the following materials:

   a. Hard or electronic copies of a completed set of units of instruction (one for each participating instructor).

   b. Hard and electronic copies of the Template for Lesson Study (one for each participating instructor, p. 27).

   c. Hard and electronic copies of the Template for a Lesson Plan or your own template for lesson planning (one for each participating instructor, p. 29).

   d. Hard copies of Key Characteristics of Effective Lessons for each participating instructor (p. 31).

   e. Relevant student performance data—one copy for each Lesson Study group.

III. Depending on the observation schedule, you may need to arrange coverage for classes of the instructors observing the lesson.

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[3] This process is based on the work of the Lesson Study Research Group, Teachers College, Columbia University, http://www.tc.columbia.edu/lessonstudy/.

Step 3: Conducting Lesson Studies— Implementation

Introduce Lesson Study. Discuss the purpose of this activity and provide an overview of the eight-step process outlined below.

Choose a goal for the Lesson Study. Ask instructors to work together to determine an instructional goal. A review of student performance data can help staff determine gaps in student achievement or student needs to address. For example, a goal could be to increase students' independent thinking, reasoning, or facility with fractions in mathematics. The following are some guiding questions for determining a relevant goal:

A review of student performance data can help staff determine gaps in student achievement or student needs to address.

- What kind of skills and knowledge do you want to foster in students attending your program?

- What gaps do you see between these necessary skills and knowledge and how students actually perform in your program?

- What gap in students' performance is the highest priority?

Situate the goal within a unit of instruction. Enter the instructional goal into the template for Lesson Study and then prompt instructors to reflect upon and come to consensus on a unit of instruction (drawn from the completed units of instruction) in which to situate the lesson. If the goal is to increase facility with fractions, for example, select a unit of study addressing fractions.

Next, guide instructors through a discussion about their students' abilities and needs with respect to this specific unit of study. These discussions should build on those conducted while identifying lead standards, but this time

focusing on the specific parameters of the selected unit of study. The purpose of these discussions is for instructors to gain a shared understanding of where their students are experiencing difficulty, so the lesson they develop will address these needs with precision.

Create the lesson. Turn instructors' attention to the standards and, based on their previous discussions of students' needs, ask them to select an appropriate lead standard and supporting standards within the unit as the basis for developing a lesson. Prompt them to name the lesson, determine its key objectives, and state explicitly how the lesson relates to the unit of study and how it addresses the Lesson Study goal. Enter this information into the template for Lesson Study.

Next, ask instructors to create a lesson together by following an established lesson-planning template. Keep in mind the Key Characteristics of Effective Lessons provided on p. 31. A template for a Lesson Plan is also provided on p. 29.

Teach and observe the lesson. Ask instructors to select a member of the group to teach the lesson while the other instructors observe. Remind observers that the observation should focus on whether the lesson sufficiently targets student knowledge and skills that are the focus of the lesson goal—*not* on the instructor's particular abilities.

To prepare for the observations, review observation etiquette, such as being seated by the start of class so as not to interrupt, supporting the natural atmosphere of the classroom, and assuming the role of researcher—not evaluator—during the observation.

To prepare for the observations, review observation etiquette, such as being seated by the start of class so as not to interrupt, supporting the natural atmosphere of the classroom, and assuming the role of researcher—not evaluator—during the observation. In addition, request that instructors record their observations on the lesson plan itself, to keep the focus on the lesson goals and activities and to facilitate feedback and reflection when the lesson plan is revised.

Debrief after the observed lesson. Immediately or within a few days of the observation, re-assemble the group to discuss the lesson and share their observations. Remind participants that it is the group effort at designing the lesson that is being reviewed. Through the following questions, guide the group in a discussion of what occurred during the lesson, that is, what worked and what could be improved:

● Was the lesson goal clear?

● Did the lesson sufficiently target student knowledge and skills that are the focus of the lesson goal?

● Did the activities support achieving the goal?

● Was the flow of the lesson coherent?

● What did student responses, presentations, or discussions indicate about what they were learning?

Emphasize the idea that the entire group—not just the instructor who taught the lesson— is listening and providing feedback.

Give the instructor who taught the lesson the first opportunity to offer reactions to the lesson. Emphasize the idea that the entire group—not just the instructor who taught the lesson—is listening and providing feedback. This demonstrates good feedback behavior for the group by beginning on a positive note, supporting statements with concrete evidence, and making suggestions based on your own experiences.

Revise and re-teach the lesson. Prompt the instructors to revise the lesson based on their observations and analysis, and select another member of the group to teach the revised lesson.

Debrief after the revised lesson. Repeat the process of observation and debriefing. During the debriefing, ask the group to describe the relationship between the two versions

of the lesson, clarifying what changes were made and how these changes related to the goal of instruction.

Report on lessons learned. Lead the group in a discussion of each step of the Lesson Study to reflect on the progress toward meeting their goal and the lessons they learned in this process.

Reflections: Thinking Back and Looking Forward

After completing Unit 2, Translating Standards into Curriculum: The Lead-Standards Approach, ask instructors to reflect on and then discuss what they have learned and to think about what additional professional development and materials might be needed. Below are some reflection questions to pose to instructors:

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the activities. What worked well and what could be improved?

- How has participating in Translating Standards into Curriculum changed your thinking about the state standards?

- How will you use these new methods and materials to improve your teaching practice and students' learning?

- Have you identified specific needs that could be addressed through additional professional development?

After instructors have developed coherent units of instruction that take advantage of connections among standards, they can proceed to the next unit. Unit 3 focuses on *closing the gap* between standards and classroom instruction—between what students are learning and doing and what they need to learn and do to meet the standards. Unit 3, Focus on Assignments: Working Together to Improve Teaching and Learning, concentrates on the actual assignments instructors give to students. Focusing on the potential gaps between assignments and standards will help staff to close any identified gaps and develop a deeper understanding of the challenging work demanded by a set of standards.

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Appendixes

A. Template for Identifying Lead Standards

B. Template for Units of Instruction

C. Template for Lesson Study

D. Sample Unit of Instruction

E. Template for a Lesson Plan

F. Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards

G. Key Characteristics of Effective Lessons

Standards-in-Action

Template for Identifying Lead Standards

Standards[4] List individual standards below	Lead Standard? Yes or No	Score: Assign 1–4 points	Criteria for Lead Standard Prerequisite? Cumulative Power? Endurance? Leverage?

[4] Reminder: For the purposes of this process, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to define what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, or benchmarks.

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Template for Units of Instruction

Content Area:_____   Level: _____

Unit #: _____ Title: _____   Estimated Timeframe: _____

Lead Standard(s)	Supporting Standards	Rationale for Cluster	Supporting Resources Chapters and Page Numbers	Sample Task or Assignment

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Template for Lesson Study

Class to be observed _____

Goal of the Lesson Study group:

Unit of instruction:

Name and objectives of the lesson being studied:

Lesson relates to the unit (and standards) in the following ways:

Lesson relates to the Lesson Study goal in the following ways:

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Sample Unit of Instruction

Content Area: <u>GED Reading and Writing</u>   Level: <u>3</u>

Unit #: <u>4</u>   Title: <u>Varied Viewpoints</u>   Estimated Timeframe: <u>6 to 8 hours</u>

Lead Standard(s)	Supporting Standards	Rationale for Cluster	Supporting Resources Chapters and Page Numbers	Sample Task or Assignment
IT-A.7 Compare and contrast readings on the same topic and explain how authors reach different conclusions, beginning with each author's stated position.	IT-A.7. Determine an author's position (i.e., what the author is arguing), providing supporting evidence from the text. IT-DP.4. Evaluate the adequacy of details and facts to achieve a specific purpose. IT-E.1. Compare (and contrast) the central ideas, problems, or situations from readings on a specific topic selected to reflect a range of viewpoints.	In this unit, students learn how to investigate texts presenting various perspectives on a topic of interest. For each text, students first must learn to identify the author's purpose, central ideas, and supporting details, as well as determine how well the author has achieved his or her purpose. Students then are ready to compare/contrast these aspects across texts and arrive at their own position on the topic.	Resource X, Chapter xx, pages 43–51 Resource X, Chapter xx, pages 76–94	Students compare and contrast argumentative essays on whether taxes should be raised to support schools. Analyze and evaluate one essay as a class, another essay in small groups, and then multiple essays within small groups or individually. Ask students to present their findings to the class. A matrix is developed to compare and contrast key features across the essays.
W-E.3 Create multi-paragraph essays that **• include a thesis statement,** **• use logical organization, and** **• make effective use of detail and evidence.**	EL.4. Identify and use correct punctuation. EL.5. Use correct capitalization. EL.2. Identify and use correct verb tenses. EL.3. Identify seven basic parts of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, conjunction, preposition).	Once students have learned how authors' lay out and support a particular position, they are ready to develop their own argument for or against a proposition in a multi-paragraph essay. The elements of such an essay are explored. During drafting and editing, students engage in activities to learn/review and apply standard forms of capitalization, punctuation, and grammar.	Resource Y, Chapter xx, pages 12–20, 52–57	Students write an argumentative essay presenting their own position on whether taxes should be raised to support schools. Students develop a logical argument, using facts and details they have gathered from their reading and from other experiences with the topic.

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Template for a Lesson Plan

Lesson: _____ Unit: _____

Standard(s):

Purpose of Instruction:
○ What key concepts or procedures will be taught?
○ What **purposes** or objectives will I explicitly communicate to students?

Materials Needed:
○ What **materials** will be needed?
○ What advance preparation is needed?

Introduction & Explanation:
○ How will I get and hold students' attention?
○ How will I tie lesson objectives to student interests and previous classroom activities?
○ What questions might I ask to stimulate student thinking?
○ How will I **introduce and explain** key skills and concepts (e.g., inductive method, mini-lecture, demonstration, notes, etc.)?

Modeling:
○ How will I **model** this skill or strategy for my students (e.g., exemplars, demonstrations, discussions)?
○ How will I break complex skills or bodies of information into understandable components?

Guided Practice:
○ How will students **practice** using the skill or concept targeted by the standard?
○ How will I gradually withdraw support as students become capable of independent performance?

Evaluation of Student Understanding:
○ How will I **evaluate** students' understanding and their readiness to move forward?
○ How will I correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning?
○ What activities will I suggest for enrichment and remediation?

Reflection, Closure, & Connection:
○ How will I engage students in **reflecting** on what they have learned?
○ What will I use to **draw ideas together** for students at the end?
○ What lessons can I **preview** for students that will follow as a result of this lesson?

Criteria for Identifying Lead Standards

I. Prerequisite to Further Study: A standard that prepares a student for the next level of study in the content area; a standard required for the next level of instruction.

Examples in ELA might include speaking about basic needs using simple learned phrases before learning how to converse on familiar topics related to self and community with strings of sentences.

Examples in ABE and ASE reading and writing might include learning to answer basic questions about text before attempting higher levels of analysis; understanding the distinguishing features of a sentence before being asked to write complete sentences; or being able to write sentences before moving on to writing coherent paragraphs.

Examples in mathematics might include teaching addition and subtraction as inverse operations of each other before moving on to teaching their relationship to multiplication and division.

II. Cumulative Power: A standard that includes or incorporates other standards. By assessing a given lead standard, one would also assess the student's command over several other standards.

Examples might include the ability to write persuasive essays, give a presentation, or construct an argument. For each of these, students must master a variety of content and skills to write or speak with a purpose in mind.

III. Endurance: A standard that qualifies as an important life skill; the knowledge and skills embedded in the standard have lasting value to a student beyond the course in which they are learned.

Examples might include understanding percentages (sales tax, tips, etc.) and graphic representations of data (found in the daily popular press); distinguishing fact from opinion and constructing an argument; or simply developing vocabulary or summarizing and paraphrasing a text.

IV. Leverage: A standard that is applicable to other disciplines or content areas.

Examples might include writing, using research skills, applying probability concepts, understanding a main idea and important details, or determining an author's purpose.

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Key Characteristics of Effective Lessons

Effective lessons align the *content* of lessons to standards:

I.   Lessons structure content around core ideas or central concepts rather than simply following the order of presentation in the textbook or other resources.

II. Instructors explicitly communicate goals to students. They identify the knowledge or skills the lesson is trying to foster (e.g., increased accuracy, speed, generalization and application, assembling elements into larger wholes).

Effective lessons align the *cognitive level* of lessons to the standards:

III. Instructors offer sequences of questions (e.g., closed-ended and factual at first, then open-ended and at higher cognitive levels) to stimulate student thinking and check understanding.

Effective lessons are *relevant* to students:

IV. Lessons are contextualized and connect to

- broader goals and objectives;

- issues of personal relevance to students, with attention to the real needs of adult students; and

- authentic problems or issues in everyday life.

V.   Instructors emphasize interactive discourse and active learning (e.g., minimizing use of solitary seatwork, extended lectures, or teacher talk). They reinforce instruction with small-group work with clear goals and individual accountability.

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Effective lessons address content in a *coherent sequence of learning:*

VI. They address specialized vocabulary, background knowledge, and prerequisite skills required for mastery of the subject matter.

VII. They break complex skills or bodies of information into components. They teach each component systematically and in sequence and then synthesize components so students are aware of the whole.

VIII. They model skills and concepts, gradually withdrawing support as students become capable of independent performance. They offer multiple practice and application activities that

- juxtapose different examples with the same defining features, so that students can generalize and learn to distinguish "same or different" for new examples; and

- develop opportunities for learning transfer and show inter-relationships among problems, including giving students ample opportunity to solve structurally similar problems.

IX. Instructors follow assignments with reflection or debriefing activities. They provide closure by reviewing all points, drawing the ideas together, and previewing the next lesson. They encourage students to reflect on what they learned, how they will apply it, and questions they still have.

Effective lessons *assess* students' level of understanding during the lesson:

X. Instructors determine that students have mastered the material before introducing new ideas. They provide detailed feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning, supplemental instruction when insufficient learning occurs, and extra learning opportunities for those ready for a further challenge.

Standards-in-Action

INNOVATIONS FOR STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

3 | FOCUS ON ASSIGNMENTS: WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Contents

Background and Purpose

Nothing more accurately confirms what happens in the classroom than instructor assignments and the student work produced in response. Together they verify what students are being taught and what they have learned, remembered, and incorporated into their knowledge and skills. By reviewing instructor assignments and the resulting student products, it is possible to examine the topics under study and determine which standards are being taught and learned. Instructor assignments and the resulting student work are—literally—standards-in-action. Misaligned assignments can derail students' ability to attain proficiency on standards.

Instructor assignments and the resulting student work are—literally—standards-in-action. Misaligned assignments can derail students' ability to attain proficiency on standards.

Focus on Assignments is based on methods pioneered by The Education Trust. Focusing on assignments enables all staff to share a common understanding of the challenging work demanded by the standards and ask students to engage with the most important ideas and questions posed by various standards. It prompts instructors to immerse students in rich learning contexts that promote active problem solving, exploration, and discovery through assignments—a central component of instructors' work.

This method helps programs close the gap between what students are learning and the expectations embodied in the standards, by inviting instructors to:

● Connect their assignments and student work to standards in a relevant and engaging manner;

● Provide appropriately rigorous academic work for students;

● Develop common, high expectations for students that are well aligned with the demands of the standards;

● Improve their assignments and instructional practices so that all students can meet standards; and

- Engage in structured, thoughtful conversations with colleagues about standards-based instruction and shared professional learning.

Instead of beginning with standards and then developing matching assignments and classroom activities for instructors, this method proceeds in the opposite order. Focusing on what instructors are presently assigning to their students offers real benefits. If instructors never take a fresh look at what they are assigning, they are unlikely to see how much needs changing. When instructors design new materials in workshops, too often they become mere add-ons—and practice does not change. Working with what instructors are already doing makes staff development relevant and concrete. This method equips instructors with the skills to choose and tailor instructional materials and practice around rigorous, standards-based assignments.

Focus on Assignments encourages instructors to help students engage with the most important ideas, questions, and skills related to the standards, and it promotes structured, thoughtful conversations about standards-based instruction and shared professional learning. Instructors have the opportunity to learn by doing the real work of teaching in cooperative *Critical Friends*[1] workgroups, which offer the added bonus of sharing work with colleagues. As instructors improve standards-based assignments, they catalogue them for program use, making the method sustainable. When new staff arrive, programs have a ready source of relevant, challenging assignments, so that new teachers can hit the ground running and work on refining assignments, rather than wasting time reinventing similar ones.

> 66 The Critical Friends process enabled us to share ideas in a positive way and benefit from the input of our colleagues. I can't count the times over the months we were together I found myself saying "That's a great idea" or "I never thought of that" or "Wow, that's a great way to do it, I can use that in *my* class..."
>
> *Deborah Abbott*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Virginia*

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[1] The Critical Friends learning community model is a professional development approach based on dialogue and reflection developed by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in 1994. See a fuller description of the Critical Friends approach in Appendix E.

Overview

The method outlined below subjects everyday assignments presently used by instructors with their students to peer review and reflection, with the goal of strengthening their relevance and alignment with content standards.

Building on what instructors already do, this method builds expertise by doing the real work of teaching in cooperative workgroups. Adult education programs form Critical Friends groups of instructors who subject their recent classroom assignments and student work to their peers' examination and solicit their suggestions for modification. They work through the following five-step method, which challenges them to inject more rigor and relevance into their assignments. The Critical Friends group:

I. Examines the purpose of the assignment: What are students expected to learn from it?

II. Analyzes the demands of the assignment: What skills and knowledge must students exhibit to complete this assignment successfully?

III. Compares standards of best fit to the assignment's demands: How rigorously aligned is the assignment with one or more grade-level standards?

IV. Diagnoses student work to determine what it suggests about how the assignment might be re-envisioned: What does the student work reveal about the kind and level of skills, and knowledge students have learned and still need to learn?

V. Redesigns the assignment and plans new instructional strategies to match: How can the assignment be upgraded to add greater rigor and encourage higher achievement from students?

Materials: What You Need to Begin

☐ See Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach (p. 20 of Unit 1).

☐ Overview of Critical Friends Groups (one for each participant for the duration of the sessions, p. 31).

☐ Feedback Checklist (one copy for each participant for at least the first few sessions, p. 23).

☐ State standards (one copy for each participant for the duration of the team's sessions).

☐ Presenting instructor's assignment (one copy for each participant for each session).

☐ Corresponding student work (one set for the team to share for each session).

☐ Form for Focus on Assignments Notes and Observations (one for each participant for each session, p. 24).

☐ Template for New and Improved Assignment (one copy for the facilitator or presenting instructor to fill out each time an assignment is presented, p. 29).

☐ Survey: How Well Are We Doing? (one copy for each participant as needed to assess team progress, p. 30).

☐ Large 3-ring binder to collect new and improved assignments.

Timeframe to Complete the Process

At the beginning of this process, instructors should meet every two weeks for about 1 hour. Allow extra time at the first session to introduce the process, set ground rules, and put the first assignment through the analysis process. Sessions should be held regularly and scheduled in advance—every week or every two weeks is best. The more regularly you hold meetings, the more automatic and efficient the process becomes. After every instructor has presented an assignment, this process can be repeated indefinitely with other assignments to continue to hone instructors' skills.

Directions for Implementation

Preparing for Focus on Assignments

I.   As a refresher on group facilitation, review the Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach.

II. Organize instructors into small teams (four to six members each) to examine assignments and the corresponding student work. Teams can be organized vertically across adult education learning levels or horizontally within or across content areas. Select the organizational structure that best suits your program's needs.

III. Give each team member an opportunity to subject at least one of his or her assignments to the process. Focus each meeting on a different instructor and his or her selected assignment. While the process is most conducive to reviewing students' written work, you also can use tapes of students' oral work.

IV. Be prepared to facilitate each meeting. The process works best and produces the most gains when facilitated—instead of expecting instructors themselves to facilitate their meetings.

V.   Before the initial meeting, decide whether or not to introduce the process and set ground rules for the team meetings without attempting to analyze an assignment. Keep in mind that the initial session takes more time if you choose to combine an introduction to the process with working through an actual assignment. Combining the two has the advantage of making the process concrete for instructors. On the other hand, separating the introduction from work on an

> *Be prepared to facilitate each meeting. The process works best and produces the most gains when facilitated—instead of expecting instructors themselves to facilitate their meetings.*

instructor's assignment gives members of the group time to internalize the process. If you decide to introduce the process in a separate session—and you are facilitating several groups—it is fine to combine the groups for the introductory session.

Before the initial meeting, decide whether or not to introduce the process and set ground rules for the team meetings without attempting to analyze an assignment.

VI.   Choose an instructor to go first who is open to receiving feedback and suggestions for improvement from peers—someone who can model the process.

VII. A few days before each team meeting, ask the presenting instructor to select a typical classroom assignment and corresponding student work. The instructor must provide a copy of the instructions for the assignment (in writing and just as they were given to students) to all team members for the meeting. The following is some advice regarding the assignments:

- Encourage instructors to provide a typical assignment *recently* given to their students, so that it is current and student work will be available.

- If teaching a particular concept has included several assignments, ask the instructor to present the culminating assignment based on the highest expression of that concept.

- Encourage instructors, who may want to offer their best assignments because they fear judgment by their peers, to bring an assignment they feel could use some attention and improvement.

- Remind instructors that the instructions for student assignments should be provided to the group just as they were given to students—orally

or in writing—with no other details or context included.

- If the instructions for the student assignment were presented orally to the students, ask instructors to write down the instructions as given and note that they were given orally.

Remind instructors that the instructions for student assignments should be provided to the group just as they were given to students—orally or in writing—with no other details or context included.

- Remind instructors *not* to include lesson plans, teaching or learning goals for the assignment, material being taught or reviewed, or information about what students did or learned, etc.

VIII. Make copies of the instructions for student assignments (one for every member of the team).

IX. Make one copy of the student work for team members to share. Number the student work so instructors can easily take notes on and refer to each sample. Depending on your program's policies, remove student names from the work samples to maintain student confidentiality and facilitate discussion.[2]

X. As instructors move through the process, look beyond the specific assignments, generalize about what's learned through the discussion, and consider ideas for additional professional development. Keep track of where instructors get lost or seem to need more help.

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[2] Removing student names from the assignment samples can safeguard confidentiality as well as help instructors to focus on the work without being distracted by what they know or have heard about a particular student.

Introducing Focus on Assignments

Remind the team that the process focuses on strengthening the assignments, not on judging or evaluating the presenting instructor.

Introduce the purpose of Focus on Assignments.
Engage in a frank discussion with each team about the challenge and rewards of giving and receiving feedback on assignments. Set the expectation that, regardless of how good an assignment is, it can always be improved. Remind the team that the process focuses on strengthening the assignments, not on judging or evaluating the presenting instructor.

As part of the introduction, include a rationale for starting with actual assignments and moving from there to the standards. Underscore the need for the assignment to stand on its own without lesson plans or additional supporting information. Students can do no better—or learn no more—than the assignments they are given. That is why it is important to be able to tell from the assignment itself (and the resulting student work) what topics are under study and which standards are being taught and learned.

Outline the five-step process.
STEP 1: Introduce and determine the purpose of the assignment.

STEP 2: Analyze the demands of the assignment without consulting the standards.

STEP 3: Compare standards of best fit to the assignment's demands.

STEP 4: Diagnose student work.

STEP 5: Ratchet-up and redesign the assignment.

Students can do no better—or learn no more—than the assignments they are given.

Review the feedback checklist with your team members. Spend some time reviewing and reflecting on the parameters of providing effective, respectful feedback to set standards for having fruitful discussions. A good place to start is by reviewing the Feedback Checklist on p. 23. Make sure the team feels it adequately reflects their desired group norms, refining the checklist as necessary.

Develop a set of ground rules. Have a discussion about what it means to serve as a critical friend. Review the Overview of Critical Friends Groups on p. 31. Then, as a group, generate a list of ground rules based on your discussions. Post the ground rules during the sessions.

Set out the full schedule of sessions. Setting out a full complement of sessions allows staff to plan ahead. The more regularly you hold meetings, the more automatic and efficient the process becomes.

Conducting the Focus on Assignments Process

Complete the Feedback Checklist. Ask each team member—including the presenting instructor—to fill out the Feedback Checklist before and after at least the first few meeting sessions to establish the ground rules firmly and to self-assess the quality of their feedback. As the team gains experience, you may want to use the checklist only intermittently when a refresher is needed.

The five-step process
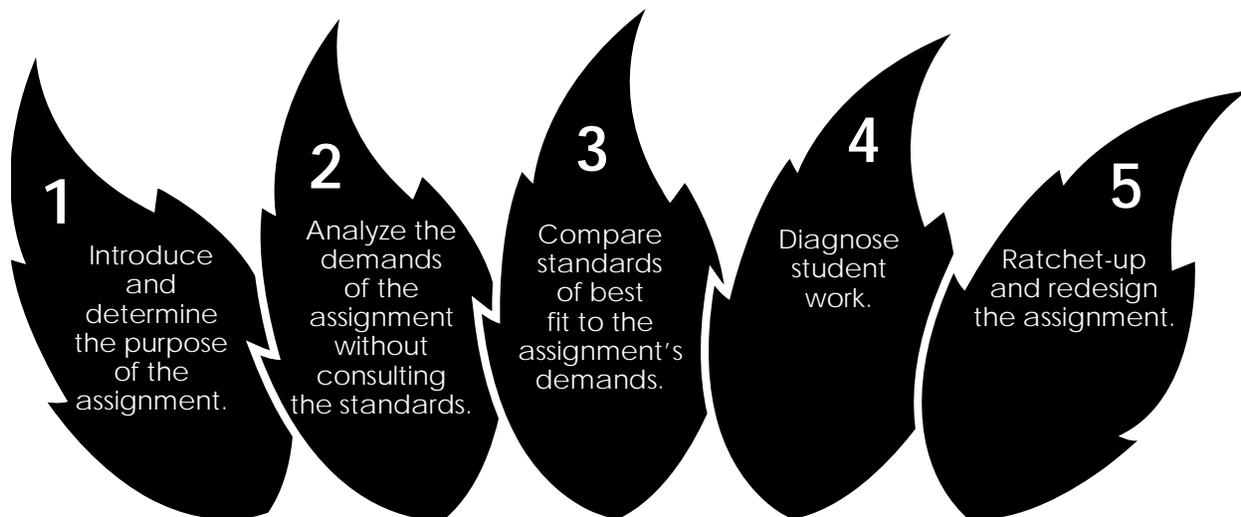
1 Introduce and determine the purpose of the assignment.

2 Analyze the demands of the assignment without consulting the standards.

3 Compare standards of best fit to the assignment's demands.

4 Diagnose student work.

5 Ratchet-up and redesign the assignment.

STEP 1: Introduce and determine the purpose of the assignment.

a. Ask the presenting instructor to take *one minute* to describe the assignment (not what was taught). If the instructor has to do more to explain the assignment to the team, chances are its purposes—or instructions—are not clear enough.

b. After briefly introducing the assignment, open the discussion to the other instructors in the group. Remind the presenting instructor to become a listener for the remainder of this step, to allow others to share their thoughts on the purpose of the assignment.

c. Remind team members to take the assignment at face value. They should not ascribe to it purposes that are not readily evident.

STEP 2: Analyze the demands of the assignment without consulting the standards.

a. Determine what a student needs to know and be able to do to complete this assignment. To do this, unpack the skills and concepts and determine where on Bloom's or another learning taxonomy the assignment falls, e.g., does it require students to explain, prove, or solve a problem? If you need a refresher on unpacking the components of standards, see Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach.

Encourage instructors to resist the temptation to imbue the assignment with skills and concepts not readily apparent, even if all agree they were probably intended.

b. Encourage instructors to resist the temptation to imbue the assignment with skills and concepts not readily apparent, even if all agree they were probably intended. If there are skills and knowledge that naturally could be part of the assignment, just capture the good ideas about how to make those explicit in the redesign of the assignment and move on to the next step.

STEP 3: Compare standards of best fit to the assignment's demands.

a. Identify the standard(s)[3] addressed by the assignment.

b. Choose no more than four standards and note whether they are at the appropriate level or a lower level of learning. If the assignment appears to be a better fit for a standard that is "below level," note the gap in rigor between the "below level" standard and a corresponding standard at the appropriate level of instruction to complete this step. Avoid force-fitting an assignment to a standard. If the assignment clearly

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[3] For purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

does not fit any standard (at the appropriate level or not), go directly to STEP 5.

c. Unpack the relevant standards and note gaps between the skills and concepts demanded by the standards and those demanded by the assignment to determine how rigorously aligned the assignment is to the standards.

Note: The presenting instructor should participate with the rest of the team in the process from this point forward. He or she can respond to and pose questions, but make sure the presenting instructor does not monopolize the discussion.

STEP 4: Diagnose student work.

a. Ask instructors to work *individually* to diagnose the student work to determine: (1) how well students did on the assignment; (2) whether and how students seemed to have problems; and (3) what skills and knowledge students actually displayed in fulfilling the assignment.

b. Then ask the team *collectively* to compare and reconcile the individual reflections. Note what students know and do not know and how students struggled, if they did.

- If the assignment is not well aligned to the standards, then move to STEP 5 to redesign.

- If the assignment is already well aligned *and* students performed well on it, then find ways to move students to higher levels of achievement through new assignments.

- If the assignment is already well aligned, *but* students did not perform well on it, discuss strategies for helping students reach what the team

> 66 The thing we've noticed most, and it's not really a surprise, is the value the teachers derive from working together. This project has allowed them to have regular, substantive time together planning and learning. As you know, this is not typical for adult education teachers…. We've noted how, as the process progressed, a more integrated approach to the standards developed— looking at the connections between multiple standards or standards across levels became more comfortable for the teachers."
>
> *Randy Stamper*
> *SIA State Liaison*
> *Virginia*

identifies as the proficient level of performance for the assignment.

STEP 5: Ratchet-up and redesign the assignment.

Looking back over the Notes and Observations from STEPS 1–4, decide what to keep, delete, or add to the assignment so that it more closely aligns to the standard(s). Work to make sure the changes add greater rigor and encourage higher achievement from students.

- Use the content of standards more than the specifics of the original assignment to guide the redesign.

- If only one standard matches the original assignment, consider adding others to enrich the assignment.

- Consider how to reconfigure the assignment to address student errors and misconceptions.

- The instructor may want to select another topic or context for the improved assignment to make it fresh and interesting to students. However, the same standard, perhaps with the addition of other level-appropriate standards, should be incorporated into the assignment, so that students can master the skills embodied in them.

- The presenting instructor also may choose to teach the revised assignment to a different set of students when that is the best instructional decision.

- The presenting instructor should leave the session with a more rigorous, aligned assignment and instructional strategies to improve student learning. If no improvements or suggestions resulted, challenge the team to reconsider.

> " The five-step process has clarified in my mind the importance of maintaining a balance between the broader real-life skills identified by our standards and the more specific benchmarks that define it. At least for ESL activities, it became clear that the best activities identified a clear real-life communicative goal (Listening, Speaking, Reading, or Writing)."
>
> *Eduardo Honold*
> *SIA State Liaison*
> *Texas*

Implementing the New and Improved Assignment

Report back to the team. Ask the presenting instructor to try the new and improved assignment and report to the team on its implementation—what went well and what could be even better. Ask the instructor to:

- Recap the assignment and how it was strengthened to align more fully with selected standards. (Note if there are ways to make the assignment even stronger.)

- Explain briefly any strategies used with students to prepare them for the assignment.

- Share examples of new student work and describe what they indicate about student learning and achievement.

Ask the team to review the feedback process as the session concludes. Ask team members, including the presenting instructor, to fill out the Feedback Checklist (see p. 23). In particular, give the presenting instructor the opportunity to express his or her feelings and thoughts to the group about the experience.

Add the new and improved assignment to the resource binder. Ask the presenting instructor to fill out the template for New and Improved Assignment, and then add that assignment, as aligned with specific standards, to a resource binder for use by instructors in your program.

Assessing the Group Process

Complete the Survey: How Well Are We Doing? After several work sessions, ask team members *individually* to fill out the survey: How Well Are We Doing? Use the results to reflect on and discuss ways to improve as a team. Discussions can be held right away, or you can collect the

> ❝ In this portion of the pilot I was able to reflect on my lesson and made some necessary changes to improve my lesson objectives. The meetings with other teachers helped me improve my lessons by going over the standards and giving me feedback which made them more level appropriate. This, at the same time, made the lesson more challenging to my students.❞
>
> *Liliana Black*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Texas*

surveys, review them, and report the results to the team at the next meeting to begin a fuller discussion. Thereafter, repeat the survey intermittently to check on team improvements on the four characteristics of a well-functioning team: Application of the Protocol, Quality Feedback, Relevance and Rigor of Re-envisioned Assignments, and Professional Development Identified.

Reflections: Thinking Back and Looking Forward

After completing Unit 3, Focus on Assignments: Working Together to Improve Teaching and Learning, ask instructors to reflect on and then discuss what they have learned and to think ahead about what additional professional development and materials might be needed. Below are some reflection questions to pose to instructors:

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the activities. What worked well and what could be improved?

- How has participating in Focus on Assignments changed your thinking about state standards?

- How will you use these methods and materials to improve your teaching practice and students' learning?

- Have you identified specific needs that could be addressed through additional professional development?

Implementing Focus on Assignments: Working Together to Improve Teaching and Learning provides an important snapshot of instruction and gives instructors time to focus thoughtfully on standards-based instruction in a supportive environment. It is one way to know the extent to which instructors are teaching to the standards and to learn what kind of assistance they need to improve. Observing standards-based lessons in classrooms—the focus of Unit 4—is a natural extension of the methods used in Focus on Assignments.

While traditional classroom observations tend to focus only on what the teacher does—often through a simple checklist—the SIA observation process directs more

attention to students and what they do in response to instruction. The ultimate goal of observing standards-in-action is to give administrators a structure for sharing their findings on the prevalent teaching practices among staff. This, in turn, allows meaningful and practical support for instructors, as they work to teach standards to an appropriate level of depth and complexity.

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Appendixes

A. Feedback Checklists for Team Members and Presenting Instructor

B. Form for Focus on Assignments Notes and Observations

C. Template for New and Improved Assignment

D. Survey: How Well Are We Doing?

E. Overview of Critical Friends Groups

Standards-in-Action

Feedback Checklist for Team Members[4]

I will…   I did…

☐ Think about how I would feel receiving the comments I give before offering them.

☐ Provide feedback on the strengths and accomplishments of the assignment, as well as its weaknesses.

☐ Regard the review as a time to be helpful to my colleague, not to display my own brilliance and expertise.

☐ Focus on the assignment, rather than on making judgments about my colleague as a person or a professional.

☐ Demonstrate support for my colleague when providing feedback by using nonjudgmental language and a supportive tone of voice and body language.

☐ Avoid overloading my colleague with feedback.

☐ Encourage my colleague to let me know when it is difficult to hear my feedback.

☐ Try to be as specific as possible, suggesting strategies, resources, etc., to improve the assignment.

☐ Leave my colleague feeling helped, motivated, and inspired.

Feedback Checklist for Presenting Instructor

I will…   I did…

☐ Stay open and receptive to the comments and reflections from my colleagues.

☐ Avoid becoming defensive.

☐ Demonstrate support for my colleagues when they are providing feedback by using nonjudgmental language and a supportive tone of voice and body language.

☐ Focus on improving the assignment, rather than viewing suggestions as criticism of my professional skills.

☐ Participate actively in re-envisioning a stronger and more aligned assignment.

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[4] Adapted from Westberg, J. and Hilliard, J. (1994). *Teaching Creatively with Video: Fostering Reflection, Communication, and other Clinical Skills.* New York: Springer Publishing.

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Form for Focus on Assignments[5] Notes and Observations

Presenting Instructor:_____ Date: _____

Content Area:_____ Level of Learning:_____

STEP 1: Examine the purpose of the assignment. (5 minutes)

- What were students expected to learn from this assignment?
- Why might the instructor have given this assignment?

Notes & Observations:

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[5] Adapted from *Standards in Practice: An Instructional Gap Analysis* by The Education Trust.

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STEP 2: Analyze the demands of the assignment (without consulting the standards). (5–10 minutes)

- What skills and knowledge do students need to complete this assignment successfully?
- Where on Bloom's or another learning taxonomy does the assignment fall? (See Bloom's Taxonomy at the end of this form.)

Unpack the assignment and note the skills and concepts:

Skills (verbs)	Concepts (nouns)	Taxonomy

STEP 3: Compare standards of best fit to the demands of the assignment. (10–15 minutes)

- Is the assignment aligned with one or more level-appropriate standards?
- How rigorously aligned is the assignment with one or more level-appropriate standards? Is it more closely aligned to lower-level standards?

Notes & Observations:

List applicable standards and their level:

Unpack the standards:[6]

Standard	Skills	Concepts	Context	Taxonomy

Note gaps between the demands[7] of the standards and the assignment, including where both fall on Bloom's or another learning taxonomy.

[6] Understanding the Standards We Teach, Unit 1 of this guide.

[7] The skills in standards are what students are expected to *do* to demonstrate mastery of the concepts, often represented by the *verbs* in a standard, and the concepts in standards are what students must *know*, generally represented by the *nouns* in a standard.

STEP 4: Diagnose student work. (15–20 minutes)

Work first *individually* and then *collectively* to answer the following questions:
- What does the student work tell us about the kind and level of skills and knowledge students have learned and still need to learn?
- Did the assignment give students the opportunity to exhibit what the standards demand?
- What are the most frequent and fundamental problems students appear to be having with the assignment? What do those patterns say about what's needed in terms of additional instruction or re-envisioning the assignment?
- If student work shows that most students have done well on the assignment, with few errors, how might the assignment be re-envisioned to challenge students?

Individual Notes & Observations:

Collective Reflections:

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STEP 5: Ratchet-up and redesign the assignment. (10–15 minutes)

Discuss how to strengthen the assignment, as well as the instructional materials and strategies needed to do so.

- How can we upgrade the assignment to add greater rigor and encourage higher achievement from students?
- What should be kept, deleted, and/or added to the assignment for tighter alignment with the standards?
- How could a re-envisioned assignment promote active problem solving, reasoning, and critical thinking?
- What instructional strategies are needed to address student errors and misconceptions?

Redesign the Assignment:

Bloom's Taxonomy:[8]

- Remembering: Retrieving, recognizing, and recalling relevant knowledge from long-term memory, e.g., list, describe, tabulate, appropriate use.
- Understanding: Constructing meaning from oral, written, and graphic messages through interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining, e.g., summarize, interpret, predict, execute.
- Applying: Carrying out or using a procedure through executing or implementing, e.g., classify, experiment, calculate, construct.
- Analyzing: Breaking material into constituent parts, determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose through differentiating, organizing, and attributing, e.g., order, explain, differentiate, achieve.
- Evaluating: Making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing, e.g., rank, assess, conclude, action.
- Creating: Putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole, reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing, e.g., combine, plan, compose, actualize.

[8] Forehand, M. (2005). Bloom's Taxonomy: Original and Revised. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching, and Technology*. Retrieved February 11, 2009, from http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/.

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Template for New and Improved Assignment

What standards are addressed by this assignment?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Write the improved assignment below.

Instructional strategies to be used with this assignment.

Inspired by The Education Trust, (2007). *Standards in Practice: An Instructional Gap Analysis*. Washington DC: Author.

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Survey: How Well Are We Doing?

Fill out this survey individually to characterize how well your team is implementing—and succeeding with—the Focus on Assignments method. Be prepared to discuss your answers about how the team might improve its functioning.

Application of the Protocol

Team members come prepared to meetings and apply the protocol to the discussion surrounding an assignment.

Occasionally____   Sometimes____   Often____   Consistently____

Quality of Feedback

Team provides honest feedback on the target assignment, as well as detailed and meaningful plans for instructional improvement.

Occasionally____   Sometimes____   Often____   Consistently____

Relevance and Rigor of Re-envisioned Assignments

Re-envisioned assignments are closely aligned to the standards and their relevance and rigor are strengthened.

Occasionally____   Sometimes____   Often____   Consistently____

Professional Development Identified

Team consistently identifies specific PD needs and organizes to obtain assistance.

Occasionally____   Sometimes____   Often____   Consistently____

Standards-in-Action

Overview of Critical Friends Groups

Introduction

The SIA Focus on Assignments process subjects everyday assignments currently in use to peer review and reflection, with the goal of strengthening their relevance and alignment with content standards. Using this method, instructors engage in planned, thoughtful conversations about standards-based education and professional learning. SIA group members begin by setting guidelines for having a collegial conversation and discussing what it means to be a Critical Friend. The following is additional information about being a Critical Friend in a professional learning community.

Background

Critical Friends groups are the product of a simple idea: providing deliberate time and structures to promote adult professional growth that is directly linked to student learning (Cromwell 2006).

The Critical Friends learning community model is a professional development approach based on dialogue and reflection. Developed in 1994 by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, its principles are rooted in K–12 school reform, but they apply to all levels of education. This model examines both curriculum and outcomes reflected in student work to improve classroom instruction. Using a set of guiding and thought-provoking questions, group members provide tailored feedback to an individual instructor seeking assistance.

Definition of Critical Friends

Some practitioners have expressed concern that the "critical" in Critical Friends will lead to the disparagement of colleagues' work. In this context, however, "critical" connotes "important," "essential," or "urgent." In other words, instructors participating in this process are meant to provide crucial assistance to their colleagues. Through critique and analysis, they collectively develop strategies to improve student learning. Costa and Kallick describe a critical friend as "a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, offers critiques of a person's work as a friend.…takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward [and who] is an advocate for the success of that work" (1993, p. 50).

Purpose

Using structured discussions, this model is a collaborative approach to professional development for practitioners. Rather than attend one-day workshops focused on general classroom issues, instructors using the Critical Friends model engage in regularly scheduled group conversations to discover solutions directly targeted to their students' needs. The collegial exchange of ideas is designed to expand participants' knowledge. Through honest, open reflection on their own practices, instructors are encouraged to be innovative and to improve the quality of their teaching.

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Critical Friends listen and ask incisive questions that encourage presenting instructors (those seeking guidance) to define and articulate the rationale and intended outcomes of their work. This refining technique has been called a "tuning process," in which instructors adjust assignments to promote optimal learning gains for their students, much as musicians tune their instruments to achieve optimal sound quality.

Process

The Annenberg Institute used adult learning theory as the basis for the Critical Friends process, especially the principle that adults can engage successfully in autonomous, self-directed group learning. To promote such learning:

- The instructor seeking guidance poses a question or presents a challenge to the group and describes desired outcomes to guide the group's work.
- The other instructors in the group raise questions and provide feedback, encouraging all members to gain new perspectives on their instructional practice.

Principles

- Examine teaching and student learning.
- Use data to inform the process.
- Share work so that colleagues can learn from one another.

- Commit time and energy to the group process.
- Be honest, reflective, and open to input from group members.
- Develop trust in, and respect and personal regard for, fellow group members.
- Recognize the competence and expertise that each group member brings to the process.
- Honor the norms established by the group.

Structural Features for Success

- Groups are small (4–6 members) to permit open discussion and foster participation by all members.
- Meetings are facilitated.
- Meetings are held regularly (at least once monthly, scheduled in advance) and for a substantial duration to maintain momentum and address pressing needs.
- Space is designated for the group meetings in a place convenient for instructors.

Guiding Questions for All Group Members

- What am I thinking now about my classroom and my teaching? What do I want to do to improve both?
- What am I learning about my teaching practice today?
- What strategies will I try in my classroom?

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INNOVATIONS FOR STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

4 | OBSERVING STANDARDS-IN-ACTION

Contents

Background and Purpose

Classroom observations are a hallmark of standards-based instructional leadership. They are a prime method program administrators can use to monitor the consistency of instructional practices and their fidelity to standards. Classroom observers also can use visits to determine relevant topics for professional development, to uncover staff apprehensions, and to connect with instructors on both personal and professional levels.

This Standards-in-Action (SIA) innovation—and the effective teaching and learning practices at its heart—helps program administrators and their leadership team create a visible presence in classrooms and shared, complementary expertise about their programs. It enables the administrative team to recognize the components of good standards-based instruction, including the extent to which lesson content, instructional practices, and classroom assessments are effective and consistent with the demands of the standards.

Observing Standards-in-Action is different and separate from formal summative evaluations of personnel. One of its most powerful features is a reliance on the aggregation of data across instructors and specific teaching and learning practices. The purpose of Observing Standards-in-Action is to reveal effective and ineffective teaching practices and curriculum choices recurring across multiple classrooms within a program—not to judge the merit or performance of a specific instructor. Observations of a single instructor cannot provide an accurate portrait of instructional quality within an entire program. But when findings from visits to every classroom within a program are analyzed, a clear picture of standards-based instruction emerges. Program administrators can then address the professional development needs of an entire faculty more effectively, by

investigating common instructional choices made by multiple instructors.

Observing Standards-in-Action is designed to be formative, non-threatening, and forward-looking—a system in which the observer is clearly invested in instructors' success. Through highly structured classroom observations, administrators and other instructional leaders assess how well instructors are teaching standards and employing effective standards-based instructional strategies. Observers are asked to assume the role of researcher rather than evaluator, coach rather than supervisor. The intent is not to pass judgment on instructors, but to coach them to more effective practice and create a way to identify improvements needed and share best practices across the program.

Observers come to lessons afresh, as students do, without the benefit of any advance meeting or detailed information about what they can expect to see and why.

Observers come to lessons afresh, as students do, without the benefit of any advance meeting or detailed information about what they can expect to see and why. The SIA Observation Tool focuses attention on students and what they do in response to instruction. Through that lens, observers are asked to determine the effectiveness of lessons vis-à-vis state standards.

Ideally, the SIA observation system will prompt administrators to get into classrooms on a regular basis, since it allows an observer to visit classrooms without preconditions or prior knowledge of the lesson to be taught.

Overview

Observing Standards-in-Action addresses three basic questions:

I.   Is the content of lessons aligned to standards and relevant to students' needs, interests, and levels of understanding?

II. How can lessons be improved to promote higher levels of student learning?

III. Based on observation feedback, what do staff identify as priorities for professional development to strengthen standards-based instruction within the program?

SIA observations identify the extent to which the following effective teaching and learning practices are evident in classrooms:

1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of the standards.

Effective teaching and learning of standards occurs when there is a direct relationship between instructional objectives, instructional resources, classroom activities, and state standards. Indicators of this effective practice include lesson objectives clearly derived from the standards and directly related to the instructional resources and activities. Effective lesson objectives are clear and conveyed to students as expected performance outcomes or results, rather than as mere descriptions of discrete activities students are expected to complete during class. For example:

Today we are going to learn how to write fractions and decimals as percents. (standards-based lesson objective)

<div align="center">vs.</div>

Today we are going to review the homework and work through pages 117–121 in your textbook. (description of activity)

2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.

Effective teaching and learning of standards occurs when instructors engage students in learning at higher levels of Bloom's (or another) learning taxonomy through varied questioning techniques and challenging assignments. Indicators of this effective practice include higher-order questions requiring students to think beyond recall and prompting them to explain their answers, as well as offering students ample wait-time to stimulate thinking and verify understanding. Assignments should be appropriately demanding, and students should be prompted to be intentional about the learning strategies they use and to assess whether they understand what they are learning.

3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.

Effective teaching and learning of standards occurs when instructors tailor instruction to the needs, strengths, and interests of adult students, keeping them actively engaged in varied and consequential learning activities. Indicators of this effective practice include instructors' efforts to relate lesson content explicitly to adults' goals as workers, family and community members, and citizens. Another indicator seeks to measure how instructors provide opportunities for students to create, solve problems, participate in interactive discourse, and otherwise practice

their newly acquired skills and knowledge in meaningful contexts.

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.

Effective teaching and learning of standards occurs when instructors build daily lessons on students' previous knowledge and make certain students have a common understanding of prerequisite skills and content before new skills or concepts are introduced. Rather than treating standards as a checklist of isolated content items, instructors cluster standards within and across lessons in ways that take advantage of their natural connections and permit deep and thoughtful coverage for learners. Indicators of this effective practice include connecting new learning explicitly to previous learning early in the lesson and concluding the lesson by summarizing the connections between what students have just learned and what they will learn in the next lesson. In addition, effective connections among standards are apparent within the lesson, showing a sensible progression of learning.

5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.

Effective teaching and learning of standards occurs when instructors and students use ongoing assessments—and feedback—to monitor and guide student learning and inform their next instructional steps. Indicators of this effective practice include instructors' routine verification of student progress during the lesson and specific, accurate corrective feedback to students. It also includes the provision of extra time and instruction for high-need students; extensions of the lesson for students ready for a

> " The whole team looked over the observation form. We discussed every aspect of it—and what we thought it should look like in the classroom. I gave teachers copies to look at and play with and get familiar with … I was as transparent as possible. They knew what I was going to be looking for."
>
> *Vanessa Cummings*
> *SIA Facilitator*
> *Oklahoma*

greater challenge; and evidence of students being asked to assess, understand, and improve their own learning.

Evidence from observations is captured in a form that generates highly specific data. An uncomplicated reporting system allows for the easy aggregation and disaggregation of information across instructors and between specific indicators. These data can be shared in easy-to-read charts and acted upon by program staff. Through the SIA observations, programs can not only shape professional development, but also determine later—through follow-up observations—whether professional development and other initiatives are producing changes in instruction.

Materials: What You Need to Begin

☐ See Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach (p. 20 of Unit 1).

☐ Copies of standards (one copy for the observer).[1]

☐ SIA Observation Guidelines (one copy for the observer, p. 39).

☐ SIA Observation Tool (one copy for each participant and for each observation, p. 22).

☐ Aggregation of Observation Data Form (one copy for the observer, p. 24).

☐ Summary of Observation Data Form (one copy for the observer and each participant at the staff meeting, p. 26).

☐ Crosswalk between the Effective Teaching and Learning Practices and the SIA innovations (p. 40).

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[1] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

Timeframe to Complete the Process

Conduct a pre-observation meeting (about 2–3 hours) with your staff to explain the purpose, principles, and content of the SIA observation system.

Observe an entire lesson (about 1 hour per observation). In some cases, one lesson will fill the entire class period. In other cases, several lessons may be presented during a class period. If classes include several lessons, you can choose to observe just one.

Allow time to observe all classrooms in your program—or a majority of classrooms, if you administer a large program with 20 or more instructors. If you ask others (e.g., directors, coordinators, or lead instructors) to conduct observations, then expand the total number of observations conducted to ensure consistency and reliability in the findings. The more staff observed, the more reliable your data. If you administer a small program with only three to five instructors, consider observing each instructor twice to improve the reliability of the data.

After conducting all observations, synthesize the results and think through a preliminary set of professional development priorities (2–3 hours).

Finally, hold a meeting with staff to discuss the findings (2–3 hours).

Total time required: approximately 6–9 hours, plus time for observations.

Directions for Implementation

Preparing to Conduct Observations

I.   As a refresher on how to facilitate groups, review the Guidelines for Meeting Facilitators in Unit 1, Understanding the Standards We Teach.

Review a videotaped lesson with your instructors to help make the practices and indicators come to life and to ensure that they are understood.

II. Before conducting observations, meet with staff to explain the purpose and principles of Observing Standards-in-Action. The observation system works best when it is well understood by both observers and those to be observed. Instructors may be apprehensive about being observed, so take time to reassure them that observations will not result in individual personnel evaluations.

III. Distribute the SIA Observation Tool (see p. 22). Discuss in some detail what teaching and learning practices will be measured, so that instructors understand the components of the system and welcome the observations as an engine for continuous improvement in standards-based instruction.

IV. Review a videotaped lesson with your instructors to help make the practices and indicators come to life and to ensure that they are understood. Videos of SIA lessons are available on the Department's Adult Education Content Standards Warehouse Website at: http://www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov/.

Using the SIA Observation Tool with an actual lesson on videotape will enable instructors to gain and share an understanding of what constitutes "evidence" of each indicator in concrete terms. Instructors also are likely to get ideas from watching another instructor in action Just going through this process will prompt

them to reflect on their own practice and to consider—and perhaps sharpen—each element of their lesson delivery.

V. To further strengthen staff understanding of Observing Standards-in-Action, you can implement a Lesson Study (described in Unit 2, Translating Standards into Curriculum) that incorporates elements of effective teaching and learning practices.

VI. Schedule observations so that you are present at the start of the lesson and stay until it is finished. Plan to arrive before the class begins.

VII. Review the SIA Observation Guidelines (see p. 39) before you conduct an observation.

VIII. For each observation, bring a copy of the appropriate standards for the level and content area and a copy of the SIA Observation Tool. For example, make sure you have the state standards for mathematics while observing a math class.

Conducting Observations

Fill in the SIA Observation Tool as the lesson proceeds. Mark an "E" for indicators that are *evident*. In cases where instructors are attempting to address an indicator but do not do it fully, effectively, or transparently—in other words, the indicator is *not fully evident*, mark it with "NFE." If an indicator is not evident at all, use the same notation, "NFE."

> **Note:** Observing effective teaching and learning practices is not a linear process. In many cases, determinations about whether or not certain practices and indicators are evident will not become

> 66 At first I didn't feel so comfortable with my observation skills. But I enjoy getting in the classroom. I want to share with teachers all the good things I see. The observations showed teachers using different kinds of delivery with different personalities, and energy, and lots of creativity—but still there were consistent results of what needed improvement."
>
> *Karisa Tashjian*
> *SIA Facilitator*
> *Rhode Island*

clear until the close of the lesson. Others will be evident early in the lesson.

Keep in mind the standards-based purpose of the lesson throughout the observation. Refer to your set of state standards. It should be clear what concepts and skills are being taught at the start of the lesson, even if you need more time to determine the precise standards being taught. If what is being taught—the concepts and skills—remains unclear throughout the lesson, then, as a rule, effective standards-based practices are not present across the board.

Be sure to examine the instructor-student interactions, including the type of student engagement and how the instructor encourages engagement.

Note: If the match between the concepts and skills and specific standards is not immediately apparent, review the standards more in depth after the observation to determine whether or not indeed you were observing a standards-based lesson.

Document the fact that you had difficulty, however, because this suggests a potential area for further discussion once you have aggregated the data across all of your observations. Ask yourself whether instructors need to be more explicit about what they are teaching or you as the observer need to become better versed in the standards and how they are manifest in instruction.

Collect evidence as the lesson progresses. Jot down notes in the third column of the SIA Observation Tool to support your findings. Note what you see and hear, including student behavior, class discussions, student and teacher actions and interactions, etc., as they happen. Keeping such notes will give you specific examples—evidence—to support your findings when discussing them with instructors. Remember to view the entire lesson.

Note: Be sure to examine the instructor-student interactions, including the type of student

engagement and how the instructor encourages engagement. Pay attention to student responses, including how students construct their understanding, strategies they use to solve problems, and patterns of student errors. As you view the lesson, ask yourself whether classroom discussions help promote student understanding:

> **It's great that we are going to create professional development that will cater directly to the areas that we did not score over 60 percent. This perhaps will help us get the tools and strategies that we need to better our program."**
>
> *Liliana Black*
> *SIA Instructor*
> *Texas*

- Are students active participants in the lesson?
- Are the instructor's questions engaging students and facilitating their thinking?
- Does the lesson content seem appropriate for the students' level of understanding?
- Is students' understanding of the content apparent?
- If not, did the instructor adjust his or her teaching to accommodate student understanding?

Seek additional clarification if needed. At the end of the class, feel free to ask the instructor if this was a typical class and whether any additional clarification would be helpful in interpreting what you observed. Obtaining materials referred to in class also can help you document your findings.

> **Note:** The data you collect need to be representative of an instructor's overall performance in the classroom. If you think that a class was atypical, you may need to conduct a second observation to obtain reliable data.

> Remember that if observations are a new practice in your program, despite your efforts to allay fears, some instructors still may harbor apprehensions that could affect teaching and learning in a classroom. This is normal. Simply factor that into your

findings. Over time, as observations become a welcome and usual practice, anxiety should subside.

Review notes and make final determinations. After observing an instructor, take time while the experience is fresh to review your notes, gather your thoughts, and make final determinations about the presence (or absence) of the indicators before proceeding to the next observation.

Tabulating the Results and Identifying Areas for Improvement

Aggregate the results. Once all observations are complete, fill in the Aggregation of Observation Data Form (see p. 24) to determine the prevalent teaching practices in your program.

Record the "Es" and NFEs" from each observation in columns 1–10 (or more) dedicating one column to each lesson observed. Then sum up the results.

For each indicator, determine the percentage of lessons displaying that indicator: Count the number of "Es" and compare that to the total number of lessons observed to determine a percentage of prevalence. For example, if seven out of 10 lessons observed derived the lesson objectives from the standards, then 70 percent of lessons are exhibiting this standards-based teaching practice.

Prepare a summary of the observation data. Complete the Summary of Observation Data Form to show the total number and prevalence of evident practices. In the lower portion of the form, summarize the practices and indicators evident in a majority of classes observed and those evident in 50 percent or less of classes observed. The latter group of indicators should form your initial list of professional development priorities for the future.

Present major findings to instructors. When you share feedback, consider staff dynamics carefully. The central purpose of the presentation is to celebrate instructors' strengths, along with increasing their awareness of standards-based teaching and learning areas that need improvement and eliciting ideas for addressing areas of weakness.

When you share feedback, consider staff dynamics carefully.

Here are some additional considerations:

- Begin on a **positive note** by thanking the instructors who taught the lessons and discussing the strengths you observed. Significant learning can come from building on strengths as well as from addressing weaknesses.

- Speak **specifically** and **concretely**, providing examples and details wherever you can, but do not identify individual instructors. Make factual, objective comments when addressing weaknesses and avoid value judgments (e.g., "In many classrooms, I did not observe connections being made between what students were learning and their lives and goals." vs. "On the whole, the lessons I observed were boring.")

- Talk only about things that **can be changed** and are **worth changing** (e.g., ignore anything that could be characterized as personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning).

- Use questions to guide the discussion and encourage instructor reflection.

  ♦ What, if anything, surprises you about the findings?

  ♦ What areas of the teaching and learning practice do you want to know more about?

♦ What professional development priorities are most pressing for the program's continuous improvement efforts for standards-based instruction?

♦ How might we structure that professional development?

Prepare a list of professional development priorities. At the meeting, prepare a list of suggested professional development priorities drawn from the observation findings, with particular attention to areas where indicators of effective practice are not evident in a majority of classes. This summary listed under part "C" could be the same list noted in "B" on the Summary of Observation Data Form. As an alternative, you may want to organize the areas of need around three to four big ideas (combining indicators strategically) informed by both the quantitative and the qualitative data and staff discussions.

Providing Access to Professional Development and Monitoring Improvement

One way for instructors to improve their skills in a particular area is to observe an expert instructor teaching a class.

Organize professional development. The following are some approaches to consider as you address the weaknesses that emerged in your observations. The list is meant to be suggestive and is in no particular order of importance.

● **Establish instructor mentors.** Look within your program for assistance from instructors who have E's by all the indicators of a specific effective practice. Then pair instructors who need assistance with those staff members. One way for instructors to improve their skills in a particular area is to observe an expert instructor teaching a class. Using instructor mentors provides professional development that is job-embedded, sustained over time, focused on the work of

the instructor, and replete with opportunities for practice and reflection.

> 66 Teachers were open to feedback. They were hungry to focus on PD so that it would help their students and help them grow as teachers. I had never before conducted observations that led to a statistical collection of data so at first it was hard to see patterns and interpret what those patterns were telling me about instruction. Then I was able to look at the data collectively and see patterns in areas where we needed improvement and areas where we were doing well. That information was vital in helping me to determine the professional development needs of the program."
>
> *Debby Cargill*
> *SIA Facilitator*
> *Virginia*

- **Revisit the SIA innovations.** Consider organizing professional development around one of the other SIA innovations. As outlined in the crosswalk (Appendix B), each of the five practices in the SIA observation system correlates directly to one or more of the other SIA innovations.

  Note: Lesson Study, a professional development process from Japan, is one SIA tool that can be especially relevant. It includes peer classroom observations and allows instructors to gain new ideas and perspectives about teaching from colleagues. (See Unit 2, Translating Standards into Curriculum, for complete directions.)

- **Seek outside resources.** If additional expertise is needed, look for existing courses or workshops. Community colleges are a good resource, as are professional organizations and your state's professional development office.

Conduct follow-up observations. Once professional development has been provided, conduct another series of observations. Then update staff about progress being made in addressing the areas previously identified as needing improvement, including any evidence from observations showing the extent to which these areas have been addressed effectively.

  Note: Subsequent observations can be streamlined by concentrating on one or two effective practices—or particular indicators within them—rather than all five practices. For example, if professional development focused on increasing the cognitive demand of lessons, classrooms can be

observed for just that practice. If observation data reveal that students are still working at the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy, it would indicate that additional or a different type of professional development would be needed.

Reflections: Thinking Back and Looking Forward

After completing Unit 4, Observing Standards-in-Action, ask instructors to reflect on and then discuss what they have learned and to think ahead about additional professional development and materials that might be needed. Below are some reflection questions to pose to instructors:

● Reflect on the effectiveness of the activities. What worked well and what could be improved?

● How has participating in Observing Standards-in-Action changed your thinking about the state standards?

● How will you use these methods and materials to improve your teaching practice and students' learning?

● Have you identified a specific need—through working with the effective teaching and learning practices—that could be addressed by follow-up professional development? Could one of the other SIA innovations meet your identified needs?

Appendixes

A. SIA Observation Tool

B. Aggregation of Observation Data Form

C. Summary of Observation Data Form

D. Sample Aggregation of Observation Data

E. Sample Summary of Observation Data and Professional
    Development Priorities

F. SIA Observation Guidelines

G. Crosswalk between the Effective Teaching and
    Learning Practices and the SIA Innovations

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SIA Observation Tool

Effective Teaching and Learning Practices	E = Evident NFE = Not Fully Evident	
1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.[1]	E/NFE	Evidence
a. Instructor presents lesson clearly reflecting the concepts/skills of one or more of the standards.		
b. Instructor outlines a well-defined standards-based lesson objective stated in terms of the desired student learning outcomes.		
c. Students use resources directly related to the targeted standards.		
2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	E/NFE	Evidence
a. Instructor poses questions that stimulate student thinking beyond recall.		
b. Instructor allows appropriate wait-time (3 or more seconds) after posing questions.		
c. Instructor asks students to elaborate on and justify their answers.		
d. Instructor activates students' metacognitive skills (e.g., models strategies, inquires about students' strategies).		
e. Students work on assignments reflecting the highest demands posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.		
3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	E/NFE	Evidence
a. Instructor ties standards-based lesson to students' goals, interests, or needs.		
b. Students actively participate in the lesson through class discussions, group projects, etc., instead of doing solitary seatwork or listening to extended lectures.		
c. Students have varied opportunities (beyond worksheets) to apply new learning in authentic or practical adult-oriented contexts.		

[1] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

Standards-in-Action

SIA Observation Tool—Continued

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	E/NFE	Evidence
a. Instructor explicitly links lesson content to previous lessons or what students already know.		
b. Students have prerequisite knowledge/skills to understand lesson content.		
c. Instructor incorporates standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections.		
d. Instructor closes lesson by: • reviewing lesson objectives; • summarizing student learning; and • previewing how the next lesson builds on that learning.		
5. Students' level of understanding is assessed during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	E/NFE	Evidence
a. Instructor regularly checks whether students are mastering standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses).		
b. Instructor provides students with prompt, specific feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning.		
c. Students signal understanding of lesson content before instructor introduces new ideas.		
d. Instructor provides supplemental instruction for students who show that they need it (e.g., individualized or peer tutoring, re-teaching, review of basic skills).		
e. Instructor provides extension activities for students who complete classwork, instead of leaving them idle or unchallenged.		
f. Students evaluate and reflect on their own learning.		

Standards-in-Action

Aggregation of Observation Data Form

Effective Teaching and Learning Practices   E = Evident   NFE = Not Fully Evident

1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.[1]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor presents lesson clearly reflecting the concepts/skills of one or more of the standards.												
b. Instructor outlines a well-defined standards-based lesson objective stated in terms of the desired student learning outcomes.												
c. Students use resources directly related to the targeted standards.												

2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor poses questions that stimulate student thinking beyond recall.												
b. Instructor allows appropriate wait-time (3 or more seconds) after posing questions.												
c. Instructor asks students to elaborate on and justify their answers.												
d. Instructor activates students' meta-cognitive skills (e.g., models strategies, inquires about students' strategies).												
e. Students work on assignments reflecting the highest demands posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.												

3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor ties standards-based lesson to students' goals, interests, or needs.												
b. Students actively participate in the lesson through class discussions, group projects, etc., instead of doing solitary seatwork or listening to extended lectures.												
c. Students have varied opportunities (beyond worksheets) to apply new learning in authentic or practical adult-oriented contexts.												

[1] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

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Aggregation of Observation Data Form—Continued

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor explicitly links lesson content to previous lessons or what students already know.												
b. Students have prerequisite knowledge/ skills to understand lesson content.												
c. Instructor incorporates standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections.												
d. Instructor closes lesson by: • reviewing lesson objectives; • summarizing student learning; and • previewing how the next lesson builds on that learning												
5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor regularly checks whether students are mastering standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses).												
b. Instructor provides students with prompt, specific feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning.												
c. Students signal understanding of lesson content before instructor introduces new ideas.												
d. Instructor provides supplemental instruction for students who show they need it (e.g., individualized or peer tutoring, re-teaching, review of basic skills).												
e. Instructor provides extension activities for students who complete classwork, instead of leaving them idle or unchallenged.												
f. Students evaluate and reflect on their own learning.												

Standards-in-Action

Summary of Observation Data Form

E = Evident
NFE = Not Fully Evident

1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.[2]	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor presents lesson clearly reflecting the concepts/skills of one or more of the standards.		
b. Instructor outlines a well-defined standards-based lesson objective stated in terms of the desired student learning outcomes.		
c. Students use resources directly related to the targeted standards.		
2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor poses questions that stimulate student thinking beyond recall.		
b. Instructor allows appropriate wait-time (3 or more seconds) after posing questions.		
c. Instructor asks students to elaborate on and justify their answers.		
d. Instructor activates students' metacognitive skills (e.g., models strategies, inquires about students' strategies).		
e. Students work on assignments reflecting the highest demands posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.		
3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor ties standards-based lesson to students' goals, interests, or needs.		
b. Students actively participate in the lesson through class discussions, group projects, etc., instead of doing solitary seatwork or listening to extended lectures.		
c. Students have varied opportunities (beyond worksheets) to apply new learning in authentic or practical adult-oriented contexts.		

[2] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

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Summary of Observation Data Form—Continued

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor explicitly links lesson content to previous lessons or what students already know.		
b. Students have prerequisite knowledge/skills to understand lesson content.		
c. Instructor incorporates standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections.		
d. Instructor closes lesson by: - reviewing lesson objectives; - summarizing student learning; and - previewing how the next lesson builds on that learning		
5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor regularly checks whether students are mastering standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses).		
b. Instructor provides students with prompt, specific feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning.		
c. Students signal understanding of lesson content before instructor introduces new ideas.		
d. Instructor provides supplemental instruction for students who show that they need it (e.g., individualized or peer tutoring, re-teaching, review of basic skills).		
e. Instructor provides extension activities for students who complete classwork, instead of leaving them idle or unchallenged.		
f. Students evaluate and reflect on their own learning.		

A. In 50 percent or more of these classes, the following practices/indicators were observed: List practices/indicators and sample relevant evidence for each.

B. In 50 percent or less of these classes, the following practices/indicators were observed: List practices/indicators and sample relevant evidence for each.

C. List priorities for professional development generated by the discussion with instructional staff.

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Sample Aggregation of Observation Data

Note that those indicators present in less than a majority of the observed classrooms are shaded. Those would serve as the basis for discussions about professional development priorities. You also could choose to pursue professional development on a certain practice even if more than a majority of staff demonstrated it; the 50 percent cut-off is merely a guide-line to aid staff in setting priorities.

Effective Teaching and Learning Practices

E = Evident NFE = Not Fully Evident

1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.[3]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor presents lesson clearly reflecting the concepts/skills of one or more of the standards.	E	E	E	E	NFE	E	E	E	E	E	9	90
b. Instructor outlines a well-defined standards-based lesson objective stated in terms of the desired student learning outcomes.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	E	NFE	E	6	60
c. Students use resources directly related to the targeted standards.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	E	E	5	50
2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor poses questions that stimulate student thinking beyond recall.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	2	20
b. Instructor allows appropriate wait-time (3 or more seconds) after posing questions.	NFE	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	E	NFE	NFE	4	40
c. Instructor asks students to elaborate on and justify their answers.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	E	NFE	NFE	5	50
d. Instructor activates students' meta-cognitive skills (e.g., models strategies, inquires about students' strategies).	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	E	E	5	50
e. Students work on assignments reflecting the highest demands posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	E	E	5	50

[3] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

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Sample Aggregation of Observation Data—Continued

3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor ties standards-based lesson to students' goals, interests, or needs.	NFE	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	E	E	E	6	60
b. Students actively participate in the lesson through class discussions, group projects, etc., instead of doing solitary seatwork or listening to extended lectures.	E	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	6	60
c. Students have varied opportunities (beyond worksheets) to apply new learning in authentic or practical adult-oriented contexts.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	NFE	E	4	40

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor explicitly links lesson content to previous lessons or what students already know.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	E	NFE	E	6	60
b. Students have prerequisite knowledge/ skills to understand lesson content.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	E	E	6	60
c. Instructor incorporates standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections.	E	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	E	6	60
d. Instructor closes lesson by: • reviewing lesson objectives; • summarizing student learning; and • previewing how the next lesson builds on that learning	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	NFE	E	4	40

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Sample Aggregation of Observation Data—Continued

5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor regularly checks whether students are mastering standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses).	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	E	6	60
b. Instructor provides students with prompt, specific feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning.	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	NFE	E	E	4	60
c. Students signal understanding of lesson content before instructor introduces new ideas.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	4	40
d. Instructor provides supplemental instruction for students who show they need it (e.g., individualized or peer tutoring, re-teaching, review of basic skills).	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	3	30
e. Instructor provides extension activities for students who complete classwork, instead of leaving them idle or unchallenged.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	3	30
f. Students evaluate and reflect on their own learning.	E	E	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	NFE	2	20

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Sample Summary of Observation Data and Professional Development Priorities

Next, summarize all indicators evident in a majority of classrooms and those evident in 50 percent or less of the classrooms. The latter group of indicators should form your professional development priorities for the next year.

E = Evident
NFE = Not Fully Evident

1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.[4]	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor presents lesson clearly reflecting the concepts/skills of one or more of the standards.	9	90
b. Instructor outlines a well-defined standards-based lesson objective stated in terms of the desired student learning outcomes.	6	60
c. Students use resources directly related to the targeted standards.	5	50
2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor poses questions that stimulate student thinking beyond recall.	2	20
b. Instructor allows appropriate wait-time (3 or more seconds) after posing questions.	4	40
c. Instructor asks students to elaborate on and justify their answers.	5	50
d. Instructor activates students' metacognitive skills (e.g., models strategies, inquires about students' strategies).	5	50
e. Students work on assignments reflecting the highest demands posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.	5	50
3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor ties standards-based lesson to students' goals, interests, or needs.	6	60
b. Students actively participate in the lesson through class discussions, group projects, etc., instead of doing solitary seatwork or listening to extended lectures.	6	60
c. Students have varied opportunities (beyond worksheets) to apply new learning in authentic or practical adult-oriented contexts.	4	40

[4] For the purposes of Standards-in-Action, a "standard" is defined as the most specific level of outcome used by a state to indicate what students should know and be able to do. These can include indicators, objectives, and benchmarks.

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Sample Summary of Observation Data and Professional Development Priorities—Continued

4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor explicitly links lesson content to previous lessons or what students already know.	6	60
b. Students have prerequisite knowledge/skills to understand lesson content.	6	60
c. Instructor incorporates standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections.	6	60
d. Instructor closes lesson by: • reviewing lesson objectives; • summarizing student learning; and • previewing how the next lesson builds on that learning	4	40
5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	Total Es	Prevalence Percent
a. Instructor regularly checks whether students are mastering standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses).	6	60
b. Instructor provides students with prompt, specific feedback to correct misunderstandings and reinforce learning.	4	60
c. Students signal understanding of lesson content before instructor introduces new ideas.	4	40
d. Instructor provides supplemental instruction for students who show that they need it (e.g., individualized or peer tutoring, re-teaching, review of basic skills).	3	30
e. Instructor provides extension activities for students who complete classwork, instead of leaving them idle or unchallenged.	3	30
f. Students evaluate and reflect on their own learning.	2	20

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A. In more than 50 percent of these classes, the following practice/indicators were observed

I. Practice/Indicators: Presented lesson objectives clearly derived from the standards and explicitly communicated those objectives to students.

   Evidence:
   ● Instructors began most lessons by informing students what the lesson would be about, providing purpose and direction to the students. In almost every case, it was evident what standards the lesson was addressing.

   ● The lesson objectives were understandable to students, and the instructors clearly had taken pains to translate the standards into terms students could understand. In several language classes, instructors even found visual ways to show students what they would be learning. In one class, the instructor began the class with an activity and then involved the students in identifying what they had done and what they would be learning today.

   ● Significantly, in all cases, objectives were stated in terms that defined the learning outcomes of the lesson and avoided the common pitfall of defining the lesson objective in terms of homework or textbook pages covered, etc.

II. Practice/Indicators: Related the lesson to students' college and career goals.

   Evidence:
   ● Instructors often referred to student goals and interests in class.

   ● It was apparent to this observer that instructors knew their students well. In some classrooms, instructors commented on such things as students' work or business in their country of origin and students' desire to earn their GED so they could go to community college to study specific subjects. In other classrooms, instructors made reference to students' interest in being able to help their children with homework and get more involved in their children's education.

III. Practice/Indicators: Provided opportunities for students to be actively engaged in class.

   Evidence:
   ● Classes were filled with actively engaged students! Several classes employed the Listen-Think-Pair-Share technique, where the instructor posed a question, provided thinking time, asked students to share in pairs, and then asked students to engage in whole-class discussion.

● Several classes had students involved in group projects that had them talking, sharing, and solving problems.

● Several classes had students involved in classroom discussions that deliberately asked them to explore points of view different from those expressed by an author or another student. In other classes, students were asked to compare and contrast objects, problems, or ideas.

IV. Practice/Indicators: Began the lesson by reviewing prior learning/re-teaching foundational skills briefly and addressed standards in a lesson in a manner that builds on their natural connections and reflects "real world" demands.

Evidence:
● Instructors often jogged the memory of students about what they already knew and could apply to the new lesson.

● Sometimes instructors reviewed the concepts/skills in a previous lesson.

● Instructors referred to problem sets students had worked on previously or named specific skills students would use to understand the new lesson.

Evidence:
● In some cases, the connections among standards came in the application activities. For example, graphing and counting skills were used to support a reading activity.

● In another case, the lesson began by focusing on one standard and then moved to focus on another. For example, a language lesson began with a listening and speaking standard and built up to a writing activity.

V. Practice/Indicators: Regularly checked whether students had understood standards-based lesson content (e.g., circulates to check on students' work, monitors verbal responses) and provided timely, precise, and understandable feedback to students.

Evidence:
● Throughout the lessons, instructors checked in with students to determine their understanding. Often this happened through question-answer periods.

● Another customary practice was circulating around the room as students worked on an assignment to make sure they understood the directions and to check their progress in completing the assignment. It was clear to this observer from instructors' conversations with students as they circulated that they really tuned into what students were doing and understanding.

- Student responses to instructors' feedback showed clearly that the feedback was able to rectify many misunderstandings and provide students with helpful information. It was noteworthy that instructors varied the wording used to express the same feedback, to ensure that if students did not understand the feedback phrased in one way, they could understand it in other words.

B. In 50 percent or less of these classes, the following practice/indicators were observed

I. Practice/Indicators: Presents instructional activities/resources directly related to the lesson objective(s).

   Evidence that professional development is needed:
   - Too many student activities did not match the stated purpose of a lesson. For example, one stated purpose was to read for comprehension, but the activity was reading aloud and no questions were posed to students about what they had read.

   - In another lesson, a stated objective was to use verbs and adverbs in sentences, but the class activity was completing a worksheet in which students were asked to identify (circle) the verbs and adverbs.

II. Practice/Indicators: Teaches lessons at the level of difficulty or cognitive demand identified in the standards. This includes using higher-level questions to engage students' thinking on deeper levels, activating students' metacognitive skills, and giving assignments reflecting the highest demands and most important concepts posed by the standards targeted by the lesson.

   Evidence that professional development is needed:
   - Most questions asked for knowledge or comprehension answers useful in reviewing/summarizing content being taught and in diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses.

   - Fewer questions were pitched at higher levels of cognition ("what if," "why," "how" questions).

   - When higher-level questions were posed, answers were rushed and instructors often offered their own responses, rather than waiting for students to think and provide more comprehensive answers.

   Evidence that professional development is needed:
   - It appears that instructors are paying some attention to metacognition, but not as consistently or transparently as needed. Few teachers actually activated these strategies by modeling their own thought processes while teaching or prompting students with

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questions. For example, "When you get stuck, what might you do?" or "Why are we practicing this skill?" "How will it help you?" "How will you use what we are learning outside of class?" "What did we learn today?" or "Can you explain the strategies you are using to solve this problem?"

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- Most student assignments were textbook-driven and did not seem flexible enough to accommodate a range of cognitive demands—especially at the higher levels demanded by the standards.

III. Practice/Indicators: Connects learning (student practice) to authentic, practical applications.

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- As noted, while students were actively involved in the class through discussions and small-group work, too much emphasis was placed on the use of worksheets, textbooks, workbooks. Rarely were students asked to solve authentic problems, apply their skills to make decisions about real issues facing them or their communities, etc.

IV. Practice/Indicators: Closes lessons with a review of lesson objectives and preview of upcoming lesson.

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- Classes tended to end rather abruptly with a homework assignment and without a review of the lesson objectives or a chance for students to reflect on their learning.

- Too many instructors seem to be overlooking the importance of closure, thus failing to use an effective strategy that helps students review and summarize the lesson, determine if lesson goals have been met, and think about the next day's lesson.

V. Practice/Indicators: Thoroughly checks on student understanding and then adjusts instruction accordingly. This includes providing feedback to students, making accommodations for students who need teacher assistance and additional instructional time, and asking students to evaluate/reflect on their own learning.

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- Students were asked to demonstrate concepts/skills in a single way—often by filling out a worksheet.

- Student assessment (and feedback) did not include more open-ended problem solving, short-term projects, authentic applications of the target skills, etc.

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Evidence that professional development is needed:
- In classes where writing or speaking were required, no writing or speaking guidelines—rubrics—were provided to students.

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- It was clear that students were often at very different points on the learning continuum, but whole-class lessons were the norm. Seldom were students strategically grouped or the style or pace of instruction differentiated to fit the different instructional needs of students.

Evidence that professional development is needed:
- While most instructors circulated to check on students' work and asked who needed additional time and help, most did not actually follow up with concrete assistance. For example, setting up peer tutoring groups, assigning a challenge task to some students while working directly with other students who said they needed help, offering students extra time (after class), etc., did not occur.

- Too often, students sat and waited with nothing to do after they completed a whole-class, group, or pair/partner instructional activity.

C. Priorities for professional development generated by the discussion with instructional staff

There are three main priorities, focused on assisting instructors in learning how to provide students with:[5]

I. A rich mix of learning activities/assignments more closely aligned to standards and directly linked to real-life applications.

    Suggestion for Professional Development:
    ● Several areas that deserve attention center on the quality—alignment, rigor, and relevance—of lessons and assignments, and these could be wrapped into a training opportunity. Students persist at tasks and learn more when they are challenged and see a clear purpose and real-life connections.

II. Opportunities to respond to different levels of questioning that address application, analysis, inference, synthesis, and evaluation.

    Suggestion for Professional Development:
    ● This is another aspect of rigor and relevance and deserves its own training emphasis. If questions ask students only to recall information, answers will remain at a low level, and higher-order thinking will be limited. Instructors need to be trained to use more effective questioning strategies so that students can be: (1) questioned at higher levels (aligned to the appropriate levels of complexity found in the standards); (2) required to think abstractly; and (3) actively involved in classroom discussions. Moreover, learning about the research behind the importance of wait-time after asking a question could improve performance on this indicator, as could instruction in how to incorporate discussions and activities to help students understand how they learn and the learning process.

III. Differentiated instruction tailored to their needs.

    Suggestion for Professional Development:
    ● Instructors need to learn how to diagnose student skills and identify the needs of different student groups via product, process, and environment.

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[5] Note that Instructors #1 and #2 appear to be good candidates to lead some professional training onsite.

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SIA Observation Guidelines

I. Support the natural atmosphere of the classroom.

    ● Arrive early and remain in the classroom during the entire lesson to capture how the lesson is set up, its flow and conclusion.

    ● Minimize your interaction with students, although contact is permitted if done discreetly and with the purpose of understanding what students are thinking and working on. Otherwise, asking questions or participating in activities can detract from your observations.

II. Circulate freely when students are working individually or in groups (if you cannot hear students or need to see their work); otherwise, move to the side or back of the room during whole-class discussion.

III. Assume the role of researcher—collecting data on teaching practices—not evaluator.

IV. Come to the lessons fresh—just as students do—without the benefit of any advance meeting or detailed information about what to expect.

V.   Pay attention to student responses, including the level of student engagement, how students are constructing their understanding, strategies they use to solve problems, and patterns of student errors.

VI. Pay attention to instructor-student interactions, including the type of student engagement and how the instructor encourages engagement.

VII. Pay attention to what the instructor says and does, as well as what he or she asks students to do.

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Crosswalk between the Effective Teaching and Learning Practices and the SIA Innovations

Following is a brief review of the elements of the SIA innovations. The chart below shows how various elements relate to each effective teaching and learning practice.

Unpacking the Components of Standards. This exercise "unpacks" each standard into its component concepts and skills and helps instructors to understand the levels of cognitive demand required to meet the standard. (Unit 1)

Building Sample Activities. This exercise provides instructors with a process to translate standards into an aligned set of activities that: 1) use the full standard; 2) reflect the cognitive demand of the standard; 3) include an end-product meaningful to students; and 4) make connections to other standards, as appropriate. (Unit 1)

Aligning Resources to Standards. This is a method for checking the alignment of resources and textbooks to the standards to determine how tightly they align with each standard and where the resource is weak or silent on specific content. (Unit 1)

Identifying Lead Standards. This exercise gives instructors a process for identifying a set of lead standards around which to organize curriculum and assessment. (Unit 2)

Designing Coherent Units of Instruction. This process teaches instructors to cluster standards in units so that they build upon one another and, through those natural connections, reflect real-world demands and enrich the meaning and content of lessons. (Unit 2)

Conducting Lesson Studies. Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience in developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan based on research on effective lessons. (Unit 2)

Focus on Assignments. This process helps programs close the gap between what students are learning and doing and the expectations embodied in standards by focusing instructor and student work on standards in a manner that is relevant, engaging, and appropriately rigorous. (Unit 3)

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How the elements of the SIA innovations relate to each effective teaching and learning practice

Effective teaching and learning practice	Elements of SIA innovations		
1. Curriculum *content* of the lessons is aligned to the demands of standards.	**Unpacking the Components of Standards:** If the content being taught is not recognizable as a standard, or there does not appear to be a direct relationship between instructional objectives and classroom activities, this tool will help instructors focus more precisely on the concepts and skills they are supposed to be teaching.	**Aligning Resources to Standards:** If student assignments students do not seem relevant to the lesson objective, this tool will allow instructors to verify the alignment of their resources to the standards and help them determine when they need to augment resources to teach standards at the right level of depth and complexity.	**Conducting Lesson Studies:** Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience with developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan that directly connects instructional objectives, instructional resources, classroom activities, and state standards.
2. *Cognitive level* of learning activities is aligned to the demands of the standards.	**Unpacking the Components of Standards:** This tool "unpacks" each standard, highlighting the levels of cognitive demand required to meet each standard, so that instructors can be more deliberate about engaging students in learning at higher levels of Bloom's (or another) learning taxonomy through varied questioning techniques and challenging assignments.	**Focus on Assignments:** This process can help instructors close the gap between what their students are learning and doing and the expectations embodied in the standards by focusing on strengthening student assignments.	**Conducting Lesson Studies:** Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience with developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan based on research on effective lessons, including such elements as offering varied sequences of questions to stimulate student thinking and to check understanding.
3. Standards are translated into lesson content *relevant* to adult students.	**Building Sample Activities:** This process gives instructors experience with translating standards into an aligned set of activities that are meaningful to students as workers, citizens, and family and community members.	**Focus on Assignments:** This process can help to improve classroom assignments so they are relevant, engaging, and appropriately rigorous.	**Conducting Lesson Studies:** Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience with developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan based on research on effective lessons. This includes such elements as contextualizing and connecting lessons to issues personally relevant to students and to real issues in everyday life, as well as emphasizing interactive discourse and active learning in authentic contexts.

Standards-in-Action

How the elements of the SIA innovations relate to each effective teaching and learning practice—Continued

Effective teaching and learning practice	SIA innovations elements		
4. Standards are addressed by a *coherent progression* of learning.	**Identifying Lead Standards:** This exercise gives instructors a process for identifying a set of lead standards around which to organize curriculum and assessment, so that lessons build on one another.	**Designing Coherent Units:** Rather than treating standards as simply a checklist of content items, instructors learn through this process to cluster standards within and across lessons in ways that take advantage of their natural connections and permit deep and thoughtful coverage for learners.	**Conducting Lesson Studies:** Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience with developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan based on research on effective lessons. This includes such elements as connecting previous lessons and prior learning to current lessons and closing a lesson by drawing together ideas learned and previewing the next lesson.
5. Students' level of understanding is *assessed* during the lesson and instruction is adjusted accordingly.	**Conducting Lesson Studies:** Working in partnership with colleagues, instructors gain concrete experience with developing, trying out, and revising a lesson plan based on research on effective lessons. This includes such elements as determining that students have mastered lesson material before introducing new ideas; providing detailed feedback; and providing both supplemental instruction for students needing help and extensions for those ready for a greater challenge.		