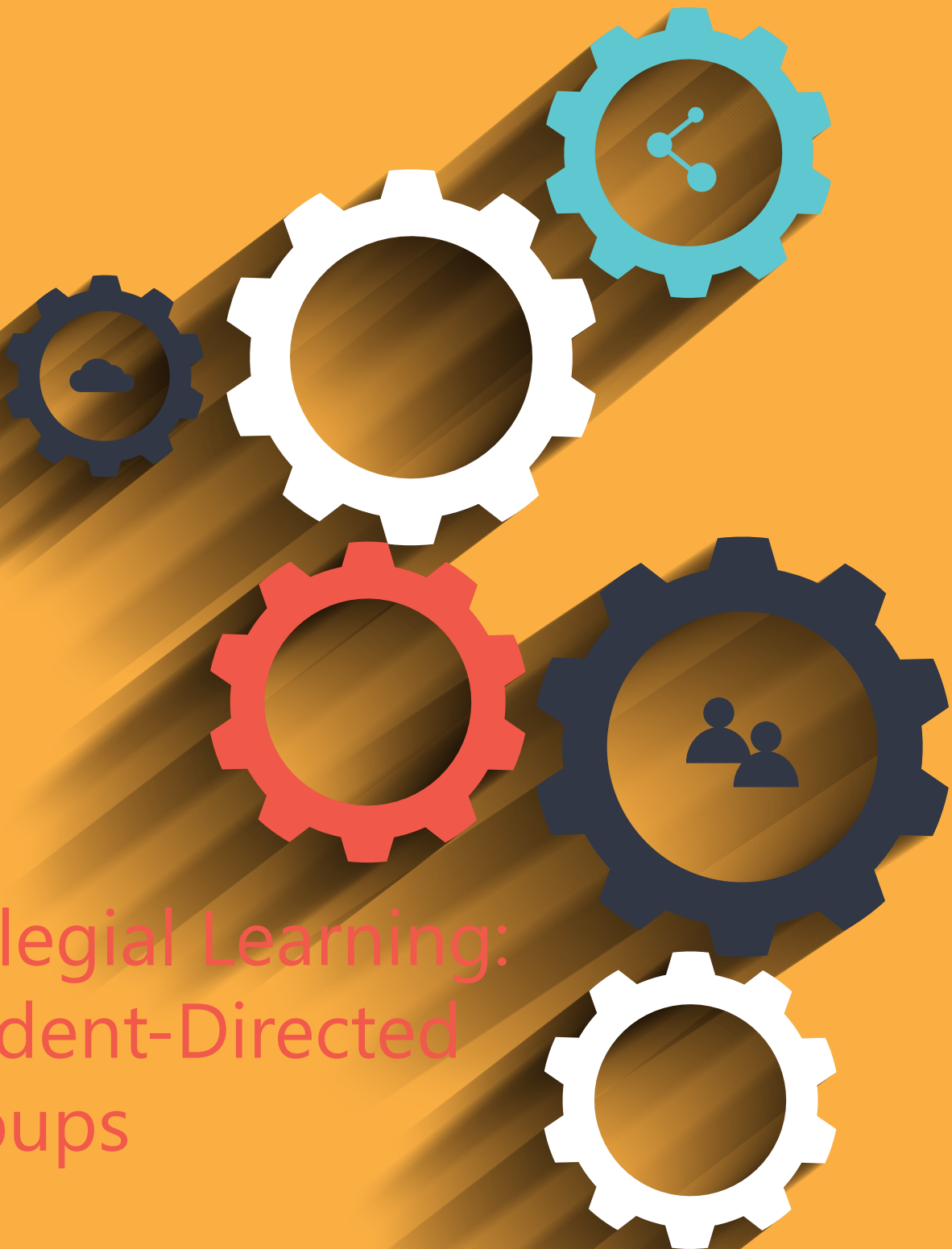


Tools for Instructional Teams and Teachers



Collegial Learning:
Student-Directed
Groups

Collegial Learning

The purpose of a learning community is “realized when all its members are engaged in learning. Some of teachers’ learning is called professional development, but that, of course, is only one avenue for learning; teachers also learn from each other, from the trials and errors of plying their craft, from each student’s own story,” (S. Redding, 2005).

Simultaneously, individual teachers are at work in their classrooms and teams collaborate toward cumulative plans. Collegial Learning happens when a district and school ensure the quality time that allows teams of teachers to work together.

Moving away from independent planning to work again as a team should not slow the momentum. It will confirm the quality of individual planning with the collective thinking-- validating the best of teaching and learning. As you will see, with a solid plan for working as a team, the pace will be consistent and the quality of well-planned lessons and solid implementation of the Indicators of Effective Practice guaranteed.

Following are suggested steps to Collegial Learning:

Step 1: Continue to align instructional units for the year

Step 2: Collaboratively review individual plans to define and document collective grade level/
department/subject instruction plans

Step 3: Develop a plan for supporting colleagues using an interview and observation tool

Step 1: Instructional Units for the Year

Secure the teaming that began the process to align instruction to standards, curriculum and assessment, and continue this planning. Yes, even while teachers may be applying the first well-planned unit in their individual classrooms, the need for the next unit is just around the bend. It is necessary that the team move forward with the management of a future unit to arrange all the parts for a well-aligned document. Remember, it is only with the right map that all other instruction and learning can be effective in this systematic planning.

Okay, so you’ve already accomplished this task once. Keep it rolling using the same framework for developing Units of Instruction and Two-Week Plans as first introduced. Standards, leveled objectives, pre and post test. The second round is always faster! Ready, set, go!

Step 2: Document Plans

Teachers work to develop instructional plans. When time allows they return with those plans to the team, and compile and synchronize the work to establish the official record for that grade level and subject.

“The business of schools is to invent tasks, activities, and assignments that the students find engaging, and that bring them into profound interactions with content and processes they will need to master to be judged well educated” (Schlechty, pg. 53). In this collaborative approach of curriculum development, the value in knowledge and experiences of two, three, or four people outweighs the isolation found in traditional instructional planning and teaching.

Additionally, teams can determine the quality of the pre- and post-tests after reviewing students’ accomplishments of the target learning statements. Analyzing the results of those tests not only confirms the quality of the assessment, but encourages a team to consider the quality of the activities assigned as instructional interventions for the students they teach between pre- and post-testing. This may also become part of the team discussion.

Ultimately, a systematic team review of the developed units of instruction is suggested. Deciding how to create a steady, continuous improvement in the future should be the goal. That goal can be reached from different paths, just as the original development, but it is that kind of consistent improvement that marks true professionalism.

Step 3: Support Colleagues

A “Teacher Interview and Classroom Observation Checklist” gives a snapshot glimpse to the Indicators of Effective Practice within an individual classroom. Used as a tool for self-assessment, or a guide for mentoring and supporting colleagues (team members), it enriches the conversation and interpretation of the Indicators.

Self-reflection is a powerful strategy that, practiced consistently, produces healthy adjustment and change or confirmation in practice. Some teachers do this as a natural strategy in their self-learning. The Teacher Interview and Classroom Observation Checklist is a tool that might guide that self-reflection regarding the effective practice indicators.

Student-Directed Instruction (Small-group)

Student-directed instruction serves several purposes: Students develop personal responsibility for their learning; they hone their learning skills and meta-cognitive skills; they learn from other students in group settings and in peer teaching arrange-

ments; and the teacher is able to target different learning activities to meet the needs of specific students while also being free to assist some students directly. The most common form of student-directed instruction is independent work, when students complete their assignments individually. This does not mean that they are all completing the same assignment. Once again, the teacher is able, through a Student Learning Plan, to differentiate instruction by giving students assignments consistent with their demonstrated prior learning. With peer teaching, or peer learning, the teacher pairs students to help each other. The act of teaching and assisting another student strengthens the learning of the peer teacher. Instructional time is increased and made specific to the student in this arrangement, as opposed to a teacher instructing all students at the same time. The third type of student-directed instruction is found in small groups of students who complete assignments provided by the teacher for the group. This format provides the opportunity for cooperative learning techniques.

In a Student-Directed Group, the teacher provides the group of students with instructions, and the group does the work. It is a good idea to establish group norms with your students for all of your Student-Directed Groups. These norms might be:

1. Name a group leader for this session.
2. Group leader reads the instructions to the group. [For non-reading age groups, the teacher does this.]
3. Think about the end goal or product you are to complete.
4. Be sure everyone participates.
5. Always be respectful of each other.
6. When the group's goal is met, go to your independent work if time permits.

The teacher's instructions include the topic and goal, to get started. The topic is related to the target learning statement. The goal is what the group is to achieve, together. It is a good idea for the goal to be a work product, such as a drawing or paragraph summary of the group's conclusions. However, there should be individual accountability determined for completion of the goal. Optimum work and habits are reinforced by the teacher that monitors the progress while offering guidance, corrections and coaching.

What are some things to consider when grouping students for cooperative learning?

1. The research suggests a group size of 2 to 5 students, depending upon the complexity of the task presented and the age of your students. It is wise to work with small groups when students are first practicing the collaborative process.
2. The nature of the task itself will often determine group size, but in general, the larger the group, the more skillful group members must be in positive interaction, fulfilling individual role assignments, and keeping on task toward goal achievement.
3. The shorter the time available for a task, the smaller the group should be.
4. Generally, the research recommends heterogeneous groupings of high-medium-low ability students, though there may be exceptions for certain kinds of tasks.
5. Teacher-designed groups create optimum conditions for long or complex tasks. Random groupings by means of such methods as "counting-off" may provide a good mix of students for short-term or easier projects.

Following is the second of five forms in this Collegial Learning series suggested for use.



Student-Directed (Heterogenous) Groups

Teacher: _____ Grade/Class Level: _____

Subject: _____

Theme: _____

Class sessions in this Unit period: _____

Date of first class day in the Unit: _____

Standard (Brief Descriptor)	Assignment to the Group (as you would explain it to the students)
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	
Topic: Goal: Essential Question:	



4 School: _____

