



## Universal PreK (UPK) Café Issue 2 - October 31, 2024

### Early Education Team Purpose Statement

Each and every young child and their family are diverse in culture, language, geography, values, beliefs and circumstances. To support individual growth, development, and continuous learning over their lifetime, the AOE is committed to fully including each and every child in a continuum of high quality, evidence-based early learning experiences from birth through grade three.

### Back-to-Basics

Back-to-Basics is the theme selected for this school year UPK Café issues. When we speak of getting back-to-basics, we mean the core teaching practices of high-quality developmentally appropriate education including lesson planning, intentional teaching, observation techniques, assessment (data collection and analysis), teacher reflection (feedback loop), supporting children at risk of, with and without disabilities and Early MTSS response plans. The Early Education team hopes that early childhood educators and support staff will find the Back-to-Basics issues helpful and supportive of continuous improvement of their teaching practices. This first issue covers lesson planning basics with highlights from the [Vermont Early Learning Standards Manual \(VELS\)](#).

### The Art of Lesson Planning

If educators were artists, with their canvases being their lesson plans, their paintings would be very different from each other. There is no one **correct** way to develop a lesson plan but there are **key components** that should be given thought during the planning process to ensure intentional teaching practices. These key components are lesson goal(s) linked to learning standards (VELS), assessment (TSG), instructional plan, adaptations or modifications, and educator reflection. For early childhood educators, the VELS is the framework for planning, developing, and implementing curriculum, instruction, and supports. While it does not dictate how to teach, it does guide and inform early childhood learning experiences in order to support, facilitate and provide high-quality and developmentally appropriate teaching practices.

Using child observations, interests, and early learning standards, early childhood educators create Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) lesson activities that may include child-directed play, guided play, direct instruction play or a combination.



**Child-directed play** differs from “free play” in that there is a clear learning objective based on a child’s interests with the educator and child collaborating in the learning process. During child-directed play, educators scaffold learning objectives for the child.

**Guided play** is most effective with preschoolers because children learn best when they are active participants in their own learning. Guided play is between free play and direct instruction utilizing child-directed interests and collaboration to promote learning. Scaffolding learning objectives during guided play is an opportune time to include social and executive functioning.

**Direct instruction play** is when the educator takes on the lead role with an intentional learning goal. Though direct instruction is part of the learning environment, it may limit playful exploration, discovery, and learning if used exclusively.

## **Curriculum and Unit Plans**

A typical curriculum is made up of themed unit plans spaced throughout the school year. Within each unit plan are several lesson plans that support the main theme of the unit. When unit planning for the entire year, it is best practice to list the VELs domains that are addressed in each theme. This gives guidance and structure for the lesson plan. It is important to remember that multiple early education standards may be used in a single lesson plan.

## **Lesson Plan Breakdown**

The function of a lesson plan is organization for intentional teaching practices for positive learning outcomes. Being organized, and having a focus allows for the learning environment to be an extra educator in the classroom by promoting structure for each and every child. Below are the main components of a lesson plan. For additional lesson plan information and a blank template, please reference pages 12, 13 and 22 of the VELs Manual.

### **Goal(s)**

List the developmentally age-appropriate goals (objectives, purpose, rationale) that children will be able to do by the end of learning activity. The VELs indicators are the specific statements of the expectations of what we expect children to be learning and doing at each age group or grade level **Tip:** Review the VELs developmental indicators to scale up or modify lesson goals.

### **Learning Standards (VELs)**

The VELs is broken down into three developmental domains. Developing Self, Communication and Expression and Learning About the World. Each section is further divided into Domains, Elements, Goals, and Indicators all of which are organized by age. **Tip 1:** More than one domain may align with lesson goals. **Tip 2:** Review the VELs indicators and lesson goals when selecting standards for lesson alignment.

## Assessment

Learning standards are expectations of what children are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education. Best practice in lesson planning is to align learning goals, standards (VELS), with a formative assessment tool, like Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD). This tri-angular approach measures if children have mastered the learning goals through observation methods and work samples. TS Gold is the approved formative (ongoing) assessment used in Vermont as the progress monitoring tool for Universal PreK children. TS Gold objectives align with VELS domains supports intentional teaching practices and documenting each child's developmental progress. For additional considerations, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and ASQ Social and Emotional (ASQ-SE) could also be used to inform planning and modifications. In this section, educators should list their method of assessment and the domains (indicators) that will be assessed.

## Instruction Plan

Instructional plans include materials used, type of activity, and time for Provide a detailed, step-by-step description for the learning activity include: **Where?** inside/outside. **How?** Small/ large group activities. **Why?** the learning activities should be used to achieve the learning activity goals. Focus on what the teacher(s) will have children do during the learning activity. Think about the environment and envision the students moving around in that environment as the learning activity progresses.

## Adaptions/Modifications/Supports

Consider modifications to make the learning activity universally accessible for children with a wide range of abilities and learning styles. Consider **inclusiveness** by including adaptations for children with disabilities who will be participating in the learning activity: Environmental supports material and activity modifications for inside or outside the classroom for equitable access. Consider a proactive approach to preventative universal, targeted and individualized supports for children with and without disabilities to build a sense of **belonging** in your learning space.

- Utilize alternate delivery methods (lecture, discussion, hands-on, internet, field work, consider children's interests, previous experiences, and allow adequate preparation time:
- Consider length of time, transitions, visuals, engagement, levels of interest, large group vs. small group activities, location-inside/outside.
- Encourage interactions such as peer buddies, "I wonder" questions, and give ample time for question-and-answer responses.
- Positive Feedback - prompting during activity and feedback clear.

Please refer to the UPK Padlet in the Resources section.

## **Educator Reflection**

Best practice is for educators to reflect on the learning activity and on their instructional practice for the lesson. The feedback loop begins with the lesson plan, instruction of the plan, assessment and progress monitoring of the learning goals for each child and for educator reflection.

### **Questions for reflection of the learning activity**

- If learning activity goals met? How do you know? What worked or did not work? What would you do differently?

### **Questions for educator reflection of practice**

Reflect on your engagement with the children during the learning activity.

- Do you use developmentally appropriate language during instruction, during the activity, and responses to each child? Reflect on gaps in your engagement with children which may require new learning to improve your engagement to ensure positive learning outcomes for all children.

## **Equitable Access**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) It is important to remember that **VELS is not a curriculum**, but rather developmentally appropriate indicators utilized to promote high-quality early learning through standards aligned curriculum promoting best teaching practices. Educational practice frameworks, like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), when used in conjunction with the VELs, support equitable access to the curriculum for each and every child. UDL creates an inclusive learning environment and universal supports to meet children where they are developmentally. Please see the VELs Manual for more information on UDL.

## **Conclusion**

Knowing how to develop a lesson plan based upon learning standards is something every educator should have in their toolbox. Though lesson plans may be individualized there are key components that should always be included for intentional teaching practices and positive learning outcomes for each and every child.

## **AOE Early Education**

If you have a resource you would like to share on **UPK Café** or have been forwarded this issue and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact us at [aoe.upk@vermont.gov](mailto:aoe.upk@vermont.gov).

Thank you for supporting each and every child and their families!

**Tammy, Katie, Amy, Wendy, Michele, Teresa and Thalia**

## **Resources**

[VELS Book](#)

[VELS Manual \(includes lesson plan template\)](#)

[Universal PreK Program Handbook](#)

[Vermont Universal Prekindergarten \(padlet.com\)](#)

[Act 166 Universal Prekindergarten: Changes to Prequalified Program](#)

[Vermont Agency of Education Early Education webpage](#)

[UPK Café Archives](#)