The Story Behind the Session: How Did You Think Today? Putting Students and Their Thinking in the Driver's Seat

Alicia Schroeder-Schock

ND Best Practices for Gifted Education: Curriculum Planning and Instruction

- Key Principles of Differentiated Instruction
    - Student-centered instructional practices and materials that are standards-based and grounded in research.
    - Instruction that has clear objectives with focused activities to reach the objectives.

Keywords: instructional objectives, thinking, depth and complexity, NAGC

What if we eliminated the phrase, "What did you learn today?" and, instead, replaced it with, "How did you think today?" What responses do you think you would get? Would your students know how to respond? How well do you think your students could articulate their thinking?

As someone who has become extremely interested in the curriculum and instruction aspect of gifted and talented education, I decided to pair up with my good friend, Brian Housand, Ph.D. to explore how we could help teachers help their students take their learning deeper, but in a meta-cognitive way.

Wait…Did I just say to take a student's thinking deeper? How many times have you heard that phrase thrown around when talking about high ability students? That was something else Brian and I set out to do: define what it actually means to take a student's thinking deeper. How could we re-engineer our teaching to empower our gifted students to focus not only on the content and questions presented but also on how they were thinking?

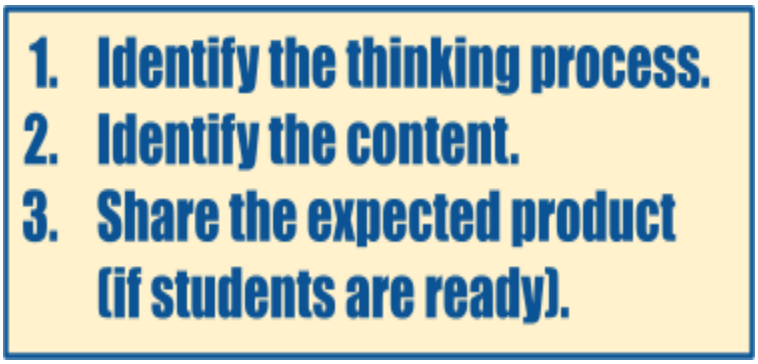
Our exploration of this topic started with an analysis of the various critical thinking and inquiry-based learning frameworks commonly used in education. These included, but were not limited to, Sandra Kaplan's Depth and Complexity Icons, Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, Project Zero's Thinking Routines, Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and Marzano's Taxonomy. We recognized that although

these resources are highly researched and undoubtedly valuable to teachers, the reality is that many teachers may be aware of these resources, but, as is often the case in education, teachers do not have the time nor professional development necessary to cross the wide trench between knowledge and meaningful application.

I knew when I decided to propose a session for NAGC's conference that I wanted to share something meaningful for teachers. Something that could be implemented the next day. Something that teachers left thinking, "Wow, I am so glad I attended that session!" To do this, Brian started synthesizing and finding patterns within the various frameworks. From this, four themes started to emerge. The frameworks often alluded to four thinking keys: Analyzing, Inferring, Synthesizing, and taking Multiple Perspectives. Once this came to light, I got to work on writing instructional objectives that began with one of the four thinking keys.

It was hard work. There were times when every time I wrote an objective I used the word "Analyze" and never ventured into the other thinking keys. Or, I would look at a math lesson and think, "Can students really use a different perspective here?" But, I soon started to realize that the more objectives I wrote, the easier it became. I started writing objectives with a small framework. 1) Identify the thinking process. 2) Identify the content. 3) Share the expected product (if students are ready).

From there, our session was really starting to come together! Brian and I were able to pull together examples and, what we found to be equally as important, non-examples, of instructional objectives that put a student's thinking in the driver's seat. We found instructional activities from various content areas and grade levels and demonstrated how each activity could be taken in an entirely different direction simply by changing the thinking key in the objective. We ended up with 30 different examples and non-examples to share with our NAGC audience.



I cannot even begin to count the hours it took to develop the session. Fridays from 3:30-4:30 regularly turned into "Meet with Brian" on my calendar in the

months leading up to NAGC. Revamps and tweaks were happening right up to the very end. But, every time I think back to the experience, I feel grateful. I also feel transformed. I cannot look at a lesson the same anymore. I am constantly questioning, “Does this objective REALLY get at the thinking I want my students engaged in? Could I add in a depth and complexity icon? What about essential vocabulary?” Sometimes I teach a lesson and realize my objective missed the mark. Sometimes I write an objective and teach an entire lesson without even sharing the objective with my students. But you know what? I’m learning. I’m growing. I’m realizing that sometimes it is more about the process than the product. And, ultimately, I’m thinking.

About the Author

Alicia Schroeder-Schock is a K-5 gifted and talented teacher in West Fargo Public Schools. She received her Master’s degree from the University of Connecticut in educational psychology with a concentration in giftedness, creativity, and talent development and is currently working on her Doctorate degree with the College of William & Mary in educational leadership with a concentration in gifted administration. Alicia volunteers as a regional representative for NDAGC and has presented in webinars covering topics such as curriculum compacting, the Schoolwide Enrichment Model, and Sandra Kaplan’s depth and complexity icons. You can watch her NDAGC presentation How Did You Think Today? Putting Students and Their Thinking in the Driver’s Seat on February 23rd, 2022 or find it in the webinar archives!