

Activity Planning

INTASC Standard #5: Application of Content
Standard #7: Planning for Instruction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 14-1 Describe the various purposes of activities.
- 14-2 Explain when to use an activity plan rather than a lesson plan.
- 14-3 Define and give examples of the four components of an activity plan.
- 14-4 Explain how to write and edit a useful activity plan.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

14-1 PURPOSES AND EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

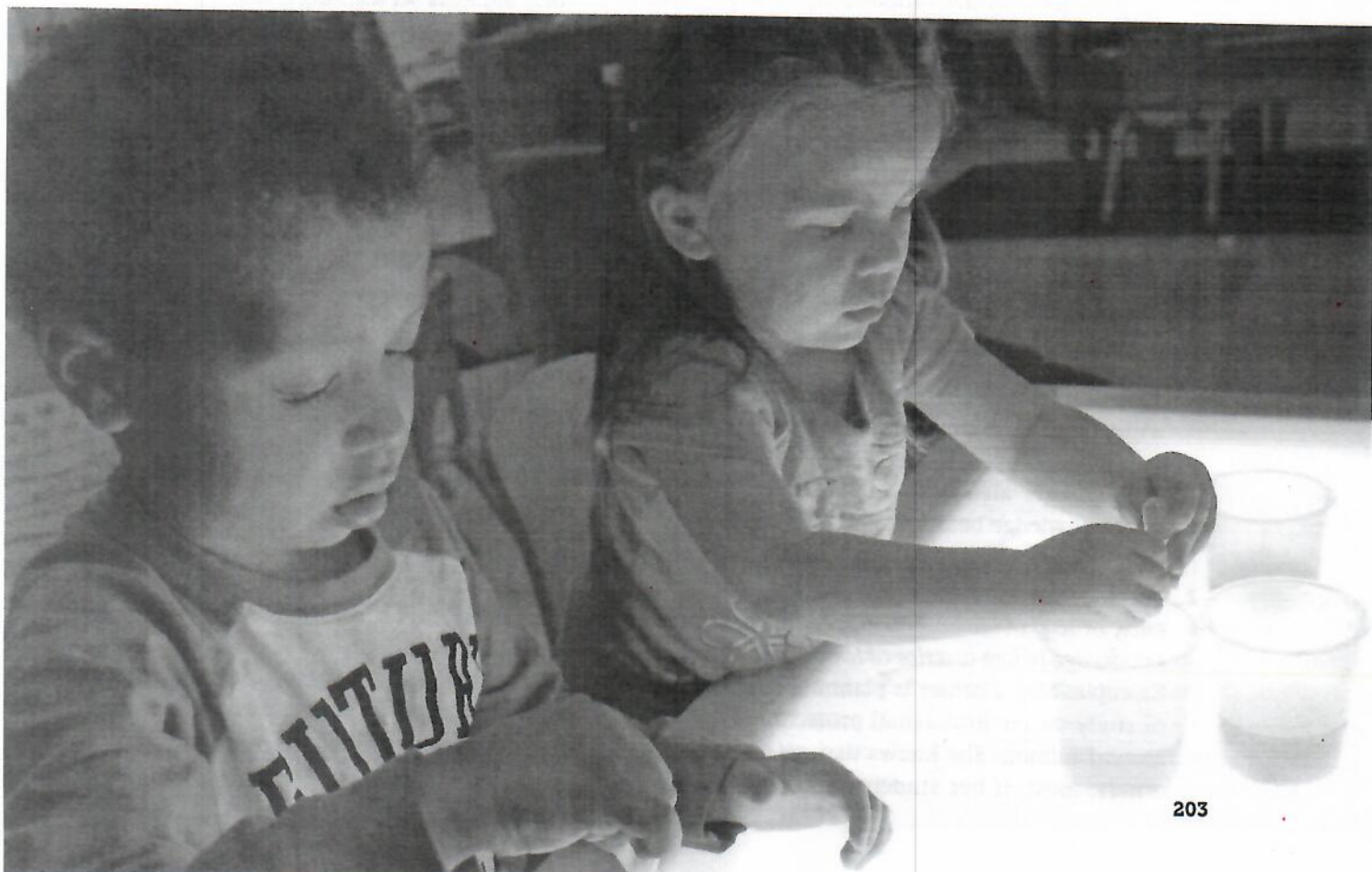
14-2 WHEN TO USE ACTIVITY PLANS

14-3 GENERIC COMPONENTS OF AN ACTIVITY PLAN

- 14-3a Component 1: Preplanning Tasks
- 14-3b Component 2: Activity Beginning
- 14-3c Component 3: Activity Middle
- 14-3d Component 4: Activity Closing

14-4 WRITING THE ACTIVITY PLAN

- 14-4a The Sequence for Writing an Activity Plan
- 14-4b Editing a Plan
- 14-4c Useful Plans



Introduction

Teachers typically use a wide variety of activities during the school day. Some of these activities are necessary routines to organize and manage all of the tasks that need to be done, such as correcting homework or getting ready to go home. Others are meant as fun or relaxing activities to provide a break for students, such as listening to music or singing a song. Certain activities occur daily, such as math timings. Others may happen only occasionally, such as watching a fun video. This

chapter is not about how to plan these types of activities, except in those cases where the activity is quite complex, such as morning opening activities.

This chapter is about how to plan for an **activity** that is directly related to the curriculum. This means an activity that introduces, extends, supplements, or enriches lessons. The purpose or rationale for any given activity may not be immediately apparent to an observer, but it is very clear to the teacher.

14-1 Purposes and Examples of Activities

Teachers develop activities as part of their long-term planning and have a clear purpose for activities that help students reach important goals and objectives. Teachers also use activities to help evaluate student needs and progress. Even though activities are not always paired with formal evaluations of individuals, teachers carefully observe their students during activities and examine the products that students create to decide whether additional activities and lessons are needed.

Here are some of the various purposes of activities, along with examples. Notice that activities often have more than one purpose.

1. *To build interest and motivate students before beginning a series of lessons.*

Example: Before beginning a series of lessons on magnets, Mrs. Wagner plans an activity. She gives students different types of magnets and materials, and has them experiment, make predictions, generate questions, and so on. Her purpose with this activity is to create interest and to motivate the students to learn more about magnets, to make sure each student has experience with magnets before beginning the lessons, and to provide practice on critical thinking skills. Mrs. Wagner also uses this activity to assess prior knowledge before deciding where to begin lessons.

2. *To build background information or experience, or to provide an opportunity to recall prior knowledge before a series of lessons.*

Example: Mrs. Chenier is planning a major unit of study on environmental protection centered around salmon. She knows that, as Northwesterners, most of her students are very familiar

with salmon, and she plans an activity designed to activate that background knowledge and experience. She puts together centers—each with photos, artwork, video clips, or realia related to salmon (e.g., a fishing pole, historical photos of salmon fishing, a video of salmon swimming upstream, Native American carvings of salmon, smoked salmon to taste, photos of orcas and sea lions eating salmon, newspaper clippings about a local salmon festival, and so on). At each center is chart paper on which students are asked to write thoughts, memories, or questions. Mrs. Chenier then uses those writings to lead a discussion and help students set learning goals.

3. *To introduce skills/knowledge that will be taught thoroughly at a later time.*

Example: Just before the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mr. Towner shows a video and leads a discussion about him. His goal is to provide general information to make sure his students understand the upcoming holiday. He has not written a short-term objective and plans no evaluation. Students will thoroughly study Dr. King's life and contributions later on as part of an American history unit.

4. *To review and practice knowledge/skills taught previously.*

Example: Mr. Beltre discovers that his students can't divide fractions. They learned how to do so in the past but don't remember how to do it now. He doesn't believe that reteaching with a complete lesson is necessary, however, because he thinks it will come back to them pretty easily. Instead, he plans an activity in which he shows an example and then, as students start to recall how to do it, asks the students to tell him the steps for dividing fractions—in other words, the students are providing the instruction. He then

has them do a number of practice problems and supervises carefully. Finally, he evaluates with a quiz. If they are still struggling, he'll go back and start from scratch with a lesson, rather than an activity.

5. *To teach skills/knowledge that are not considered important basic skills* (i.e., they don't require mastery by students and are not prerequisite to other important skills).

Example: Mr. Floyd plans an art activity in which he will teach his students to tie-dye. He will include many of the elements of lesson planning—step-by-step explanations, demonstrations, and supervised practice. However, this is considered an activity because tie-dyeing is not an important basic skill (anymore) and because students will each produce a tie-dyed item, but with Mr. Floyd's help. He will not test them later, either by asking them to list the steps in tie-dyeing or by asking them to make a tie-dyed item independently.

6. *To provide ongoing practice toward long-term objectives or goals.*

Example: Following Ms. VanHenley's math lessons on the multiplication concept and operation, her students can figure out the answers to single-digit multiplication problems using drawings and blocks, but they are not always 100 percent accurate, and they are very slow. Ms. VanHenley plans a series of practice activities—partner flashcard practice and multiplication bingo—to help the students toward the long-term objective of writing answers to multiplication fact problems (0–10) at a rate of 80 digits per minute with no errors. In this case, Ms. VanHenley follows each activity with a timed math fact test in order to chart individual student progress toward the objective.

7. *To provide opportunities for students to apply a previously learned skill.*

Example: Students have had earlier lessons on how to write business letters. You now plan an application activity in which students write letters to the agricultural extension agent asking for information on rabbit care (there is a pet rabbit in the classroom). You may choose to review earlier lessons at the beginning of the activity, but you are not providing complete instruction on letter writing.

8. *To provide opportunities for students to generalize previously learned information.*

Example: Mrs. Begay has previously taught her students to write one-sentence summaries of written material. She is currently teaching her students note-taking skills. She plans an activity in which students will be asked to listen to brief oral presentations and then write one-sentence summaries of them. She will watch carefully to see if the students can generalize their knowledge of summarizing written material to summarizing oral material.

9. *To provide opportunities for students to integrate knowledge and skills learned from lessons in different subject areas.*

Example: Several teachers co-plan an activity in which students design and plant a garden in the schoolyard. The students will use measuring skills learned in math, information about plant needs for light and water learned in science, and group decision-making skills learned in social skills lessons to select the vegetables to be planted.

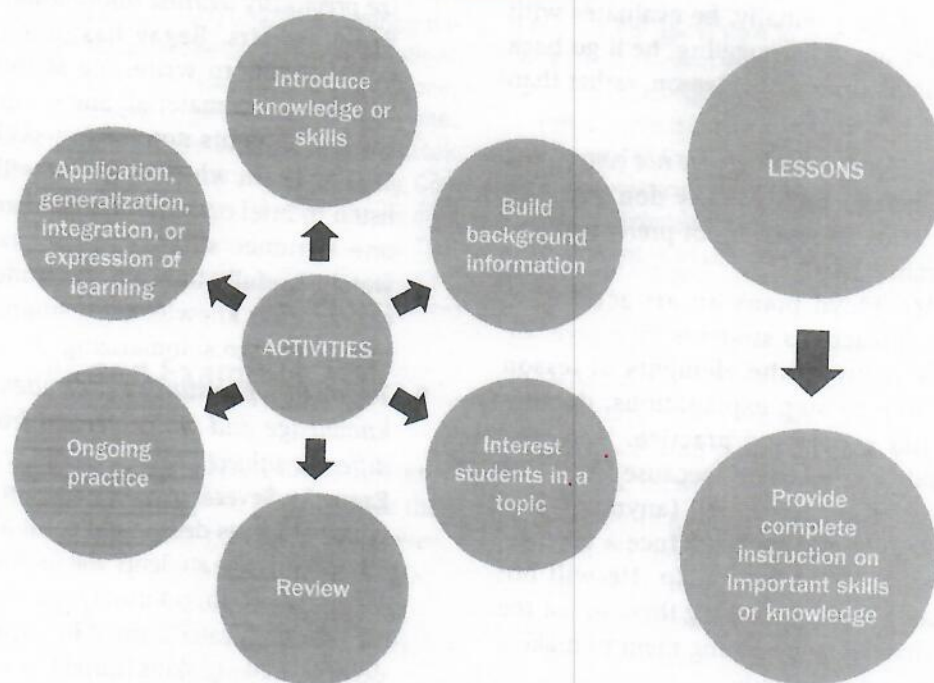
10. *To provide opportunities for students to express their understanding and demonstrate their learning.*

Example: Mrs. Eerkes plans an activity to follow a series of lessons on the Civil War. It will be a simulated debate in Congress on the issue of preserving the union versus states' rights. The students will be divided into two groups and will be given time to research the issues and to plan their speeches. Mrs. Eerkes has several purposes for this activity: (1) to provide practice in public speaking and cooperative planning and research, (2) to encourage a deeper understanding of the issues involved, and (3) to allow the students to demonstrate their knowledge in an alternative way. She knows that this activity will not allow her to be aware of each student's independent understanding, so she has planned other evaluation methods as well.

14-2 When to Use Activity Plans

It is important to recognize when you should use an **activity plan** and when to use a lesson plan. Look at Figure 14.1 and also look back at Teacher Checklist 13.1 in Chapter 13 to help you decide.

Activities have different intended outcomes than lessons. Activities, however, sometimes look

Figure 14.1 Purposes of Activities and Lessons

very much like lessons and include some of the same elements. For example, an activity may provide initial information on an important basic skill new to students, but if it is not intended to end with the evaluation of each student's independent performance of that skill, then it is an activity, not a lesson. Activities may lead up to lessons, be part of lessons, follow up lessons, or extend lessons, but they are not lessons.

Consider the following example of an activity and how it is different from a lesson. Mr. Palm plans an activity for his second graders about polar bears. He reads a story and then helps the students put together a book that includes drawings and sentences about polar bears. Mr. Palm is providing instruction, in a sense, because his students do not know many of the polar bear facts discussed in the book. However, he does not really care whether each student memorizes these facts and does not intend to give a test on polar bears. Knowledge of polar bears is not the objective. Polar bears are a vehicle for providing ongoing practice on listening skills, fine motor skills, writing complete sentences, and so on. As he looks at the students' books, he will monitor progress on these skills ("I see that Ralph is still forgetting to put a period at the end

of his sentences"), but plans no short-term objective with a formal evaluation. Mr. Palm may have other goals as well—for example, to pique curiosity about animals and nature or to give the students experience in being authors.

It is important to note that various components of a *lesson plan* may have the same purposes as noted for activities; for example, the opening of a lesson may be intended to motivate students. In addition, lessons sometimes incorporate activities to extend the presentation of information. For example, a teacher may have students put together models of the heart during a lesson on the circulatory system. When activities are part of a daily lesson, they should be included within the lesson plan itself. When activities are part of a series of lessons or unit, or when activities are long and complex, it will be helpful to write a separate activity plan.

Teachers typically decide what activities to use while planning units of instruction. Teachers may also plan additional activities based on their assessments of student progress. For example, Mrs. Rabe finds that her students need more practice on the concepts of "above" and "below" than originally planned.

Summary

You will plan many types of activities for your students, and they should all have a clear purpose. Be sure you can state the important long-term objective that each activity will help your students meet. Written activity plans vary greatly because the

design of the plan depends on the activity itself. All activity plans, however, include the same basic components. Teaching Plans 8, 12, and 13 in the Appendix are examples of activity plans.

Key Terms & Definitions

Activity: A planned instructional event intended to introduce, extend, supplement, or enrich lessons.

Activity beginning: The component meant to prepare students to participate and learn; includes the set up and opening.

Activity closing: The component that helps students tie learning and practice all together.

Activity middle: The component describing what the students and teacher will be doing during the activity.

Activity plan: A written description of the events that will take place during an activity; comprised of four generic components.

Congruence: When components of a teaching plan match and work together for the same outcome.

Preplanning tasks [for activities]: Selecting long-term objectives, identifying connections, writing description and rationale, and analyzing content.

Useful plan: A teaching plan that is a good resource for the teacher and those who observe him/her.

Portfolio Pointers

- Use planning documents to showcase activity objectives/descriptions/rationales that reflect an emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to real-world issues that are relevant to learners. (InTASC Standard 5: Application of Content)

- Select student work that highlights planned accommodations for the strengths and needs of individual learners. (InTASC Standard 7: Planning for Instruction)