

Background and Rationale: Learning Tools & Teaching Strategies

Developing incremental, intentional instruction strategies that are aligned with the goals to scaffold and support student learning improves student achievement.

A learning tool is something a student does or uses in the process of learning; a teaching strategy is something a teacher does or uses in the process of teaching to support the student use of the learning tool. *It is that simple.* We're just not used to pulling them apart. Some traditional examples of teaching strategies and learning tools include:

- ✓ Teacher *delivers a lecture* (teaching strategy); student takes *notes* (learning tool) while listening.
- ✓ Teacher *shows a video* (teaching strategy); student fills in *viewing guide* (learning tool) while watching.
- ✓ Teacher *assigns chapter in the text* (teaching strategy); student answers *end of the chapter questions* (learning tool) while reading.

In these traditional examples, the teacher doesn't begin by planning what the student will do. He doesn't say, "For this unit I'll have my students do two viewing sheets, take notes three times and answer end of the chapter questions twice before we start sculpting with clay." Instead, the teacher starts with what he will do. "For this unit I'll assign the chapters on design and three-dimensional art, show those two videos and give a couple of short lectures on shape and space before we start working with clay."

Considering learning tools and teaching strategies separately helps teachers shift from the traditional way of thinking and planning a lesson by starting with what students will need to do to meet the learning goal and how that should be broken down into manageable, incremental steps rather than starting with what the teacher will do. What the teacher will do depends on the incremental steps the students must take to meet the learning goal. Instruction becomes intentional when it supports the students in using the learning tools to meet the learning goal.

Teachers usually consider two other issues in the lesson planning process before reaching the detail level of learning tools and teaching strategies. One is content standard benchmarks (See ***Content Standards & Classroom Level Learning Goals***) because standard benchmarks mandate what *students must learn*, and the other is which ***Learning Process***—create, perform, respond or inquire—is at the heart of the *work student will accomplish* (See ***Learning Processes & Lesson Design***) to demonstrate their learning. The emphasis in both of these issues is on what the *student does*, not on the *actions of the teacher*.

One way to think about learning tools and teaching strategies is in the construction of a brick wall. The learning tools are the bricks (the real and tangible work the students do in the classroom) and teaching strategies (the support or instruction the teacher offers so students can use the learning tools appropriately) are the mortar. That mortar holds the bricks securely in place and allows for the wall of learning to grow higher and higher.