

*This special newsletter is coming to you from **Deans for Impact** to support your work in the Learning by Scientific Design Network. Together, we'll continue exploring how we can support novice teachers to use learning-science informed practices in their teaching. This week, let's take a look at the [principle](#) of Deepening Meaning and Learning, zeroing in on the teacher action of **creating attention to meaning**.*

---

## Teacher action

***Teachers' questions and tasks focus student attention on the meaning of content.***

**Background:** Since memory is the residue of thought (as cognitive psychologist Dan Willingham [explains](#)), teachers need to carefully consider what they ask students to think about, particularly because working memory is so limited. How are novice teachers curating students' attention so that the most important content is at the center of the task or questions? How are novice teachers aligning each part of their lesson to the big idea so that students can see the through line clearly?

---

## Connections to equity

**Equity in education is achieved when all students have the resources they need to excel.** This means providing additional attention, resources and support where historical oppression has produced the greatest gaps in outcomes.

Put another way, equity is removing the predictability of outcomes that correlate with any social or cultural factor (e.g. race, gender, class, disability, etc.). Since the 1960s, equity in education has taken on the meaning of addressing historical inequality by providing more resources to address gaps between minoritized groups and majoritized groups.

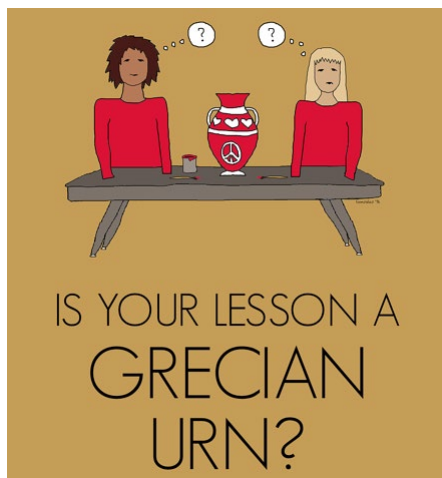
### Fostering Identity Safety

In this article, Shane Safir explores the importance of identity safety in the classroom and the dangers of stereotype threat on students' ability to focus their attention on academic content. Throughout, you'll find other helpful resources and further reading.



---

## Connections to classroom practice



### Is your lesson a Grecian urn?

We often hear that student engagement is an important goal for a lesson. It is! But what if students are engaged in thinking about things that aren't essential for what they should be learning? This blog post from Jennifer Gonzalez illuminates how engagement and learning should go hand in hand, but engagement should never be at the expense of learning.

---

## Lenses to observe for this teacher action

Consider these criteria while observing teacher-candidates on creating attention to meaning:



### Learning goal

The lesson has a clear, achievable, grade-level learning goal.



### Tasks & activities

Each individual task or activity focuses student attention on the meaning of the to-be-remembered content.



### All learners

All learners, not just a subset, are engaged in thinking about the meaning of the to-be-learned material.

---

## Tips to explain and coach for this teacher action



### Why it's important to refine the learning goal for the session

High-quality learning goals are clear, achievable, and appropriate for the grade level. This is so important

because it focuses both you and your students on the core to-be-remembered content of the lesson.

From an equity perspective, we know that minoritized groups systematically receive fewer opportunities to engage in grade-level learning, so spending time with this learning goal can be extremely consequential! To do this, we have to create learning goals that are explicit for students.

**Rehearsal Task: Revise that learning goal to be clear, achievable, and grade-level appropriate. How could you rewrite the learning goal to achieve those criteria?**



### **Why it's important to align the lesson's tasks and activities to the central content of the learning goal**

Aligning our lesson's tasks and activities to the core content embedded in the learning goal is so important because we can only learn what we pay attention to, and no one has endless attention! Directing student attention towards to-be-learned content, then, becomes an important goal.

From an equity perspective, we know that minoritized groups systematically receive fewer opportunities to engage in grade-level learning, so making sure that student opportunities in our classroom are completely focused on that grade-level content is a top priority! To do this, we have to think carefully about what content is absolutely essential for students to accomplish the

learning goal, and ensure that content is embedded in each task we provide.

**Rehearsal Task: Revise some of the lesson's tasks and activities to be aligned to the core content of the learning goal. Which task or activity could be changed to more directly target core content?**



### **Why it's important to ensure that all students are attending to the central content of the learning goal**

Creating opportunities for all students to think effortfully about the material is so important because you're ensuring equitable access to learning opportunities. If some students are paying attention and others are not, then we've unintentionally created inequitable opportunities for students to learn in our classrooms.

From an equity perspective, we know that gaps in learning compound over time, so it's really important to think carefully about the engagement of all students. Sometimes this means engaging students whole group, in partners, in small groups, or in focused independent work, depending on what we're hoping to accomplish. To select the right structure, we first have to diagnose why some, but not all, students are attending to the core content of the lesson.

**Rehearsal Task: Revise some of the lesson's structures to ensure that there are opportunities for all students to attend to the core content of today's lesson. What is one structure you could use to increase engagement in the core content?**