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Unstoppable Learning: Seven Essential Elements to Unleash Student Potential

By Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Unstoppable Learning: Seven Essential Elements to Unleash Student Potential* by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey. *Unstoppable Learning* recognizes that systems thinking is crucial to improving teaching and learning because complex webs of relationships impact the classroom.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Planning Learning

1. In your opinion, why should teachers start their planning processes with getting to know their students? What different class personality traits or teacher planning procedures have made some of your classes more challenging than ones in other years?
2. Why is it vital to determine students' content knowledge at the beginning of the school year? Briefly describe one method for obtaining this information about students.
3. With the preassessment passage activity, why shouldn't synonyms be counted as correct responses?
4. In your own words, describe the five levels of curriculum documented by George Posner.
5. Why shouldn't students be able to answer a central unit question with just a yes-or-no response? Draft your own central question for a unit.
6. Briefly describe the seven components for planning a dynamic lesson, and accompany each component with the statement that corresponds to it.

7. What are culminating projects? How do they relate to daily lesson plans? Upon examining the example culminating project that is provided, briefly develop a culminating project that you could use in your class.

8. How do you recognize students' classroom contributions, such as acts of thoughtfulness or resourcefulness, as opposed to solely recognizing academic achievements? Considering the routines for recognition listed on pages 42–43, what additional procedures for recognizing students do you think would best be incorporated into your class?

Chapter 2

Launching Learning

1. How have you seen students shut down when they are intimidated by learning? What have you or your school done to bolster students' sense of safety in their studies?
2. What social learning intention would you add to the list of intentions provided on page 50, and why?
3. Why do the authors prefer the term *purpose* to *learning target*, *learning intention*, or *objective*?
4. As suggested by the authors, spend a few moments after class considering error patterns that you've noticed, and jot down your thoughts with your smartphone. How will this activity allow you to directly confront students' misunderstandings?
5. Why should the myth of error-free learning be left behind? Why is anticipating errors not just a means to preventing them from happening?
6. Name the four categories of memorable ways to drive learning suggested by Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak, and briefly describe each category.

7. What are *grabbers*, and why are they called this?

8. What is the intent of direct explanations? What do they draw attention to? Provide an example of how a teacher can provide a direct explanation for how content information is employed.

9. How do the functions of modeling and think-alouds differ?

Chapter 3

Consolidating Learning

1. Across which four dimensions does Donald Campbell define task complexity? How is the term *complexity* different from *difficulty*?
2. What do read-alouds provide to students that most other tasks do not? Name two myths regarding read-alouds' qualities.
3. Why do the authors encourage students to read with a pencil and annotate as they read? How are annotations and a consistent annotation system helpful for teachers as they assess students' comprehension?
4. Consider the sample student activities for group work provided in figure 3.2 (pages 79–80). Which of the activities have you done with students? Which activities would you try, and why?
5. Which of the conversational moves listed on pages 82–83 that stimulate accountable talk with students are you best at utilizing? Which one requires the most growth on your part, and how could you promote self-improvement in this area?

6. What drives a flow experience? How can schools achieve flow?

7. What is the important task design difference between problem-based learning tasks and project-based learning tasks?

8. How is being educated different from collecting isolated facts?

Chapter 4

Assessing Learning

1. Why is assessment critical to determining if a unit's content has been learned? How did a faculty training session remind the authors of assessment's importance?
2. How do criterion-referenced tests differ from norm-referenced tests?
3. Provide a few examples of formal formative assessments as well as informal formative assessments.
4. Why are measures of writing performance useful assessment tools? Why may holistic writing rubrics be less helpful for progress monitoring than they are for teaching?
5. List the types of reliability featured in table 4.3 (page 97), and in your own words, describe their purposes.
6. Describe a test item, such as a mathematics word problem, that you have found to be unintentionally biased for some students.

7. Consider the examples that the authors provide for incorporating index cards and dry-erase boards into instruction. What are some other ways in which you could see yourself using these techniques?

8. What does a teacher saying, “It takes time away from instruction,” signal to the authors about him or her? What does “teaching to the test” require educators to do?

Chapter 5

Adapting Learning

1. How was differentiating instruction used in the case of Nancy, whose fitness training is detailed at the beginning of the chapter, and why was it critical to her continued progress?
2. What is involved in what the authors consider to be the best kind of reteaching?
3. What do the practices of realia, scaffolding, and compacting each entail?
4. For what three reasons does Mr. Tabers give his students tiered tests?
5. When is whole-group instruction most helpful? Why is it necessary to utilize other instructional methods in combination with whole-group instruction?
6. Why does systems thinking feature prominently in teaching students with disabilities, and why may systems thinking greatly resonate with special education teachers?
7. How does an accommodation differ from a modification? Name some examples of input accommodations and output accommodations.

8. Briefly describe the different personal support options that teachers can provide to students.

Chapter 6

Managing Learning

1. Why did one of Doug's mentors say that teachers shouldn't smile in front of students?
Why do the authors disagree with this advice, saying instead to smile as much as possible as a teacher?
2. Why is it important to acknowledge or welcome students as they come into the classroom?
3. As the authors suggest, gather data on your school interactions for a week. Do you detect a pattern regarding whom you talk to and to whom you don't talk? Why do teachers tend to interact less with lower-achieving students?
4. Why can it be beneficial to connect with students through humor and passion? Why does sarcasm, specifically, have no place in schools?
5. When managing peer relationships in a class, why shouldn't the most isolated and the most popular students be placed together? What configuration of students is preferable, and why?

6. Record several behaviors that you have demonstrated today. In which of the behavioral categories listed on page 139 do these behaviors fall?

7. What three things are functional behavior analyses used to do?

8. In your own words, what are antecedents? How are consequences different from antecedents?

9. How do restorative practices differ from conventional disciplinary programs?

Chapter 7

Leading Learning

1. In your own words, list the five tips that the authors adapted from the business world for setting clear expectations.
2. According to Mara Sapon-Shevin, what must people of all ages and abilities know how to do?
3. The authors list the four major themes that they organize school citizenship around on page 157. What four themes would you consider to be the most important to your school's expectations for citizenship?
4. Why should schools' expectations for teachers be instituted with the teachers' input? How does your school involve teachers in establishing expectations set for them, and what changes would you make in the expectation-development process that is in place?
5. In your own words, what are the dimensions of effective professional development?

6. Consider the types of learning walks described in table 7.1 (page 166). Which of these walks would you consider adopting, and why? Why may some teachers be reluctant to employ learning walks?

7. What is one of the main differences between members of schools and members of the corporate world?

8. Review the top-ten qualities that *Forbes* identifies for being an effective leader. Assess your skills in these areas. Which of these qualities are your strongest, and with which could you use the most work? How can you hone these weaker skills?