

FROM BEST PRACTICES TO NEXT PRACTICES

In general, ‘best’ practices (once implemented), become ‘next’ practices (Fullan *et al. La cohérence*) because they are adjusted to better meet learners’ needs. Dialogue and reflexivity form the core of these practices, meaning that learners are in almost constant interaction. Instructional planning must allow learners more time to read, to think, to deliberate, to create, and to write.

The planning of a series of tasks must take into account the concept of secondarization (a cognitive function whereby learners reflect on their own words and actions) in order to choose and to adjust instructional tasks based on learner needs. Plastré (2) specifies that the concept of secondarization makes it possible to:

- understand that the main skill required of a teacher is the ability to analyze learners’ progress, difficulties, obstacles, and successes
- debunk the myth whereby everything is fine in a classroom if learners are simply occupied: It is not activity that drives development, but rather the awareness of its properties

Bucheton (“Écriture”) states that planning does not consist of organizing a multitude of tasks, but rather a few complex tasks that are well-orchestrated by the teacher to allow learners time to think by and for themselves. Planning tasks according to best practices is crucial. Such planning must emphasize the reflective, creative, cultural, and communicative dimensions of language where:

- reading, writing, and speaking are consistently interconnected
- learners deepen their reading and writing skills, but above all gain habits of mind; that is, the ability to think and to rethink by and for themselves

Effective planning takes time and perseverance, both at the preliminary stages and in the classroom, because reflexive teaching requires supporting the gradual intellectual development of learners by allowing them to think, learn, and grow together and to build positive academic and linguistic identities where they feel:

- self-confident and respected for who they are and what they can do
- capable of thinking about their lives, themselves, life around them, life together, and of acting upon those thoughts
- capable of successfully tackling a given topic, whether at school or in society

Linguistic accuracy must be addressed when planning tasks. Learners must make the connection between what they want to say and how to say it correctly. Moments of secondarization should therefore take into account both the usual components of language learning (gender, number, verbs, pronouns, etc.) and the modes of speaking, thinking, writing, and representing specific to a given subject area.

Adopting ‘best’ practices necessitates a fundamental change in classroom teaching practices. Teachers must refrain both from doing the work for learners and from repeating instructions (unless truly no one has understood them). Learners are capable of seeking help from others, and of offering assistance in return, during periods of discussion, reflexivity, and secondarization. Teachers are there to guide, to monitor, and to nurture their students’ cognitive development and habits of mind. This monitoring, this formative-interactive assessment, takes place over the many moments of reflexivity, reading, and writing of intermediary texts that result in more complex, more sophisticated output. Consequently, teachers are to dedicate the majority of classroom time toward observing the cognitive progress of learners and the accuracy of their oral communication in order to adjust tasks in real time and to plan future tasks accordingly.

Step-by-step procedures and lists of criteria provided in advance are not enough to develop habits of mind in all learners. Bucheton recommends that they not to be discarded either, because those procedures and lists will serve as tools for the maturing text, to see if the text complies with standards, and for learners to examine their creations (“Écriture” 1:45:15).

For learners to be doing and thinking, they must be given topics that are relevant and accessible to them, texts that motivate them to think, read, share, and write. The themes that interest learners most at all grade levels, according to a survey by Beers and Probst (*Disrupting*), relate to social problems such as climate change — problems for which they want solutions. Even the youngest learners are discussing and seeking solutions to these issues. A little probing by the teacher quickly reveals students’ preoccupations and areas of interest.

Best practices, be they yours, those of your colleagues, or those from other sources, are worth attempting, adjusting if necessary, and then trying again, hence the expression “going from best to next practices”. But first, it is important to respect the best practices’ basic principles so that teachers may see where and how to better adapt them to the needs of their students. Next practices must nonetheless prove themselves to be more effective than previous approaches. This should become evident at various moments of secondarization, moments where speech, structures, texts, etc. become an object of study, inquiry, analysis and/or commentary.

The abilities and the knowledge needed to improve our practices are already in the field. This work must be done together – including teachers, consultants, principals, and divisional administrators – and we must share our practices (Bucheton “Écriture”; main idea of work done by Fullan and Quinn).