SOLUTION TREE

BOOK STUDY

Breaking With Tradition

BOOK STUDY

with Solution Tree

Brian M. Stack and Jonathan G. Vander Els
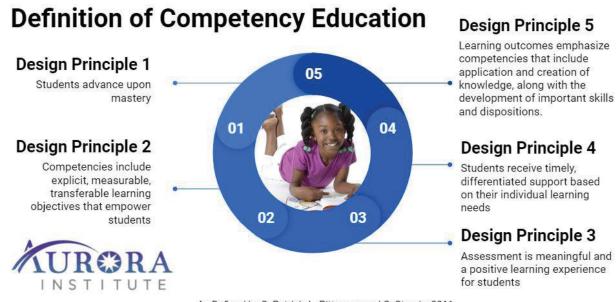
Book Study Overview

The book study has been organized into six sessions, each 45 minutes in length. Participants will be asked to read the assigned chapters (in advance) and come to the session ready to discuss the reading, using the guiding questions identified for each session.

Monday, July 13
Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview of the Design Principles

In this session, we will work with you to understand the five design principles associated with the Aurora Institute 2011 definition of competency-based learning.

Discussion Questions

1. As an educator and as a professional, what is drawing you to learning more about the competency-based learning model?

2. In this first chapter, Brian drew a parallel between competency-based learning and driver education. What other real-life examples can be used to help someone better understand the model, particularly someone who is not in the education field?

3. If you had to pick just one design principle as a jumping-off point for your own competency-based learning work, which principle would you pick and why?

4. How would you respond if students' parents asked you what supports your school has in place to help their child succeed? In what ways do effective schools ensure their practices allow all students to gain the timely, differentiated learning support they each require?

Definition of Competency Education

Design Principle 1
Students advance upon mastery

Design Principle 2
Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students

Design Principle 5
Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Design Principle 4
Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs

Design Principle 3
Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students

AURORA INSTITUTE

- As Defined by S. Patrick, L. Pittenger, and C. Sturgis, 2011

Chapters 2 and 3: PLCs at Work, and Developing Competencies and Essential Standards

In this session, we will work with you to review the PLC at Work® structure and think about how it can be leveraged to support a competency-based learning model in a school. The work to develop Critical Question #1, (What is it we want students to learn?), a robust system of competencies, standards, and learning progressions, will also be unpacked.

Discussion Questions

1. Briefly define the four pillars of a professional learning community (PLC) and the four questions that correspond to the pillars. What is your school's mission (your why) and vision (becoming the school you wish to become)?

2. How do the four essential questions of a PLC connect to the work teams must engage in, in order to support a competency-based learning environment for all students?

3. What are the differences between competencies and standards? How are they related?

4. What theme should all competency-implementation scenarios include? Why do the authors believe a bottom-up approach with top-down support best helps develop appropriate, rigorous competencies and learning progressions?

Chapters 4 and 5: Competency-Based Grading and a Balanced Assessment System

In this session, we will work with you to take a deeper look at the grading and assessment strategies that best support a competency-based learning system at any level.

Discussion Questions

1. What considerations should schools make as they determine what common set of grading expectations to set for all teachers? What grading expectations do you think your school should include in its common set of expectations, and why?

2. What components must a well-designed, balanced competency-based assessment system include? What role does formative assessment play in your classroom or school?

3. What existing procedures, policies, beliefs, and traditions in your own school's culture and community must you carefully consider before you make a plan to gradually change your grading and assessment practices to a competency-based learning model?

Monday, August 10
Chapters 6 and 7: Supporting All Learners (Intervention and Extension), and Supporting the Change Process

In this session, we will work with you to hone in on the many ways that individuals and teams in competency-based systems can provide personalized support to students. You will also think about the change process and how it can be structured to support the transition to competency-based learning in a school or system.

Discussion Questions

1. What questions should guide a school leadership team's discussions in planning for how to provide daily opportunities for support and extension? Which of these questions are specific to planning academic structures, and which of these questions allow teachers to consider the human resources aspect of intervention and extension?

2. What is disruptive innovation, and why has competency-based learning disrupted the educational system? Why is it important to be clear on your mission and vision when implementing change?

3. When building your transition plan to move to competency-based learning in your classroom or school, what will be tight? What will be loose? Why?

Friday, August 21
Chapter 8: Design Rubrics

In this session, we will work with you to reflect on your own realities and readiness to advance your work in competency-based learning in your classroom or school.

Discussion Questions

1. What critical questions should stakeholders reflect on as educators embark on a journey to competency-based learning, and how can the design principles focus this work?

2. In reflecting upon the design principle rubric, what is an area of strength in your school?

3. What is a logical entry point for YOUR school to take? What area will be the most challenging? What would be a logical next step if you have already started the work?

In this session, we will work with you to think through the next steps in your work to advance competency-based learning in your classroom or school. We will share a revised definition of competency education published by the Aurora Institute in 2019.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see as obvious differences between the 2019 definition and the 2011 definition of competency education?

2. How can an effective competency-based learning system address equity concerns in a classroom or school?

3. What are actionable next steps your school can take based upon your design principle reflection from Session 5?

New Definition of Competency Education

Design Principle 1
Students are empowered daily to make important decisions about their learning experiences, how they will create and apply knowledge, and how they will demonstrate their learning.

Design Principle 2
Assessment is a meaningful, positive, and empowering learning experience for students that yields timely, relevant, and actionable evidence.

Design Principle 3
Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.

Design Principle 7
Rigorous, common expectations for learning (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) are explicit, transparent, measurable, and transferable.

Design Principle 6
Strategies to ensure equity for all students are embedded in the culture, structure, and pedagogy of schools and education systems.

Design Principle 5
Students learn actively using different pathways and varied pacing.

Design Principle 4
Students progress based on evidence of mastery, not seat time.

AURORA INSTITUTE

Written by E. Levine and S. Patrick, 2019