Instructors: Peter Gow Brad Rathgeber

1.0 Overview of Week 1

This Week's Objectives

- 1. To understand what makes a school an "independent school"
- 2. To understand the importance of "culture" in independent schools and to begin to understand the culture of the independent school that the course participant will be entering.
- 3. To prepare for the first day of school and coming onto campus for the first time.

Module Plan

In order to meet our learning objectives, we have four sections for this unit. The first three are content sections, and the last section is an engagement section. Prepare to spend approximately 2 hours in the content sections, and 2 hours in the engagements.

1.1.1 READ A Primer on Independent Schools

For those of you new to independent schools, it may be helpful to understand the context of independent schools in the American educational system and in definition. Take a look at the resource below and the resources attached, both from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS).

NAIS Definition of an Independent School:

Independent schools are 501(c)3 nonprofit corporate entities, independent in governance and finance, meaning:

- 1. Independent schools "own themselves" (as opposed to public schools owned by the government or faith-based schools owned or controlled by a religious body) and govern themselves, typically with a self-perpetuating board of trustees that performs fiduciary duties of oversight and strategic duties of funding and setting the direction and vision of the enterprise, and by delegating day to day operations entirely to the head of school. Boards employ one employee and that is the Head of School. Typically, the Board of Trustees evaluates the Head and hires/fires the Head. The Head employs all other faculty and staff members.
- 2. Independent schools finance themselves (as opposed to public schools, which are funded through the government and parochial or faith-based schools, which are subsidized by a church or religiously-affiliated organization). Independent schools are typically financed through charging tuition, fund raising, and transferring a certain annual percentage of income from endowment. Independence is the unique characteristic of this segment of the education industry, offering schools four freedoms that contribute to their success: the freedom to define their own missions; the freedom to admit and retain only those students well-matched to the

mission; the freedom to define the qualifications for high quality teachers; and the freedom to determine what to teach and how best to assess student achievement and progress.

https://www.nais.org/articles/pages/making-sense-of-k-12-schools-in-the-united-states/

1.1.2 READ Missions of Independent Schools

"A newcomer seems more in a week than a host sees in a year." This proverb speaks to the opportunity you have in coming new to a school and in understanding that school from the inside out. You can only be new once. Enjoy the process and the first impressions you gather.

The mission statements of many independent schools are ratified by the Board of Trustees and often appear prominently in the literature and iconography of our schools. Many mission statements risk being interchangeable, but most hope to educate young people to thrive in a complex world. Similarly, the values in many independent schools often focus on integrity, resilience, empathy, hard work. It makes sense that the mission and values of many of our schools are similar. They are worthy and important lenses through which to consider the whole educational enterprise. What is rarely the same from one independent school to the other, however, is the school culture. Girls' schools, Quaker Schools, large coed schools, small progressive schools, urban, rural, established, new-all these identifiers shape a school's culture, and, when you spend time in independent schools, you feel the difference—almost immediately, but it can be hard to put those differences into words. That is culture. Each independent school has its own culture, loosely described as "feel," "norms," "ways of being and doing things," "traditions," "assumptions," "degree of formality," "attitudes towards students, parents, colleagues, administration, trustees." Obviously, that is a terribly vague definition. But newcomers must discern culture quickly in order to make their way successfully in their schools. And administrators or seasoned members of the faculty and staff can help newcomers navigate culture by pointing the way, articulating the school's spoken and unspoken expectations about how the community operates. All schools have aspirational cultures: the school people want the school to be. In many institutions there can be a gap between everyday and aspirational, but do not let that alarm you. There is value in the vision, in the struggle to be the best version of itself a school can be.

Now, ask yourself what you know about the school culture that you are entering. **What** questions do you need to ask to get to the heart of that culture? What can you learn about school culture before stepping on campus (from the website, from the student newspaper, from a mentor, etc)?

As an extension, how might the culture you will be creating in your own classroom be informed by or reflective of the school's mission, and how might you bring this to pass?

1.1.3 EXPLORE Principles of Good Practice

Every independent school that is part of NAIS agrees to adhere to a general set of principles of practice that sets out guidelines for interaction within a school and between schools. Helpfully, these principles are published and are organized by role.

You may have gathered by now that professionals in independent schools often play many roles, and wear many hats. At one moment, we might be teaching biology, whereas at the next moment, we're working as an advisor, or coach, or chaperone, or... Therefore...

We'd like you to take some time to explore and consider the Principles of Good Practice for all the roles you'll play (or may play) in your school. You don't have to read all the enumerated lists, but choose the ones that are likely to apply directly to you and have a look. And please don't neglect the overarching ones such as "**Equity and Justice**" and "**Educating for Global**

Citizenship and International Mindedness." Sometimes schools struggle to find ways to integrate these "big" and general principles with their own very specific missions and strategic priorities, but you will find that these will mean a great deal to many of your colleagues and students in the day to day.

https://www.nais.org/learn/principles-of-good-practice/

1.2.1 EXPLORE School Missions

Let's take a few minutes to explore independent schools in the areas in which we live. Use the link below to search and find three other independent schools near to where you live (preferably ones that you are not familiar with already).

What is similar about how these schools describe themselves? What is different? Thinking about this will help us understand the similarities and differences within our community.

https://www.nais.org/find-a-school/?src=footer

1.2.2 READ Peter's Thoughts on the Ideal and Actual Missions of Independent Schools

Peter has been a longtime and prolific blogger in the independent school community, including having a stint as a blogger for Education Week a couple of years ago. In that capacity, he wrote a number of pieces that helped the wider independent school community understand the quirks of independent schools. Take a look at his piece on missions of schools now.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/independent_schools/2014/07/independent_school_mission_statements_and_missions.html

1.3.1 WATCH Voices from the Field

Throughout this course, we will hear a variety of perspectives from members of the independent school community. We hope that you will find nuggets of wisdom and new ideas to ponder in listening to these diverse and different perspectives.

3 Videos

1.4 EARN YOUR BADGE Two Assignments

In order to earn your badge for this unit, you need to complete one of the "Check Your Understanding" activities and one of the "Apply Your Knowledge" activities. You are more than welcome to do both activities in each category.

Check Your Understanding (Choose one)

1.4.1: REFLECT 3-2-1

After going through the information in this unit... Post in this discussion board: 3 things you found out 2 things you found interesting 1 question you still have

1.4.2: DESCRIBE Idea that Resonated

You've been introduced to many new ideas in this unit. Take one idea (or fact) that has resonated with you, and explain it in approximately one paragraph.

1.4.3: DISCUSS New School's Mission & Culture

What attracted you to teaching in an independent school? Why were you attracted to the school at which you will be working this fall? What do you already know about your new school's culture? Reflect on all three topics in your post, writing no more than one paragraph on each question in your initial post. Then, feel free to ask questions of colleagues and respond to their posts.

Apply Your Knowledge (Choose one)

1.4.3 DISCUSS What Attracted You to Your School

What attracted you to teaching in an independent school? Was it the promise of the students? The commitment to education from the families? The culture of independence and creativity? What was it?

And, why were you attracted to the school at which you will be working this fall? In particular, is there anything in your school's mission statement (you may need to look this up) or values that particularly drew you to the school?

And now, the tough one. What do you already know about your new school's culture? How did you discern the culture during your visits or interviews. It is often said that in schools, it is hard to get the culture right, but easy to know when someone gets it wrong.

Please reflect on all three topics in your post, writing no more than one paragraph on each question in your initial post. Then, feel free to ask questions of colleagues and respond to their posts.

Guidelines

- Your initial response should be no more than 250 words in length, reflecting on the prompt above.
- Return to the discussion over the next few days and reply to one or two of your classmates -ask a question, offer a compliment, challenge an idea.

1.4.4: CASE STUDY First Day of School

Consider the advice from this unit and the age of the students you will be working with. How do you introduce yourself to your students on the first day of school?

Consider the advice you have encountered in this unit and the age of the students you are working with. How did you introduce yourself to your students on the first day of school, and how did that work for you? In what ways have you been successful so far in building the kinds of personal connections that are the basis of a classroom culture?

At the top of your post, note the age of students that you work with (administrators, note age or how you work with students). In one paragraph to describe how you introduced yourself.

And, then in a second paragraph note how you have tailored your presence and identity in your classroom to create a productive culture.

2.0 Overview of Week 2

This Week's Objectives

- 1. Continue to develop common understandings of what good learning and teaching looks like in our schools
- 2. Create strategies for working with parents as partners in the learning process
- 3. Understand independent school work with parents and "advisory systems"
- 4. Offer a safe space for questions that participants have on their minds

Module Plan

In order to meet our learning objectives, we have four sections for this unit. The first three are content sections, and the last section is an engagement section. Prepare to spend approximately 2 hours in the content sections, and 2 hours in the engagements.

2.1.1 CONSIDER Curating & Creating Curriculum

If you are unfamiliar with the work of Grant Wiggins, you are in for a treat. And, if you know Wiggins's work, consider this a fun reminder of his wisdom.

As we start into this unit on curating and creating curriculum, let's consider Wiggins's essay on not trying to include everything. (NOTE FROM PETER: *This article, when I encountered it a couple of years after it was published, literally changed my life from genial old-timey teacher to someone who actually cared about curriculum.*)

The Futility of Trying to teach everything of importance Wiggins.

Let's also take a few minutes to consider these thoughts from Tom Vander Ark on how we might define "curriculum" in a contemporary context https://www.gettingsmart.com/2017/01/curriculum-managed-instruction-personalized-learning/

2.1.2 USE Design Templates for Lessons and Units

Peter has put together two templates that may be helpful in your work designing curriculum. The first is a curriculum design template, empty and filled-in with a mock unit, that might be a helpful resource on "planning backwards."

You do not need to do anything with these templates at this point, but we hope that they become useful in your plan for the school year.

GOW UNIT DESIGN TEMPLATE.docx

GOW UNIT DESIGN TEMPLATE WW1 COMPLETED copy.pdf

The second is a lesson planning template that is useful as a model.

Lesson Planner.doc

(NOTE FROM PETER: These are pretty boiled down but are based on a combination of the Harvard Project Zero Teaching for Understanding approach and the ideas spread far and wide by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe as Understanding by Design; their book of that title is a great and comprehensive resource on creating great curriculum and assessments.)

SUPPLEMENT: Bloom's Taxonomy

If you aren't familiar with Bloom's taxonomy of learning, take some time to understand the basics here in this resource, as well:

http://www.bloomstaxonomy.org/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20questions.pdf

2.2.1 Assessments & Grading Overview

One of the key characteristics of an independent school teacher is a passion for being reflective and thoughtful in our approach to teaching. To this end, assessment (and, subsequently, grading) is extremely important.

Every school has its own policies and procedures regarding assessments and grading. And, you will want to become intimately familiar with the policies at your school.

The overarching purpose of our classes is to help our students develop their capacity for critical understanding. As you would in planning any course, begin thinking of assessment by asking some essential questions:

- "What is the purpose of assessment?" Assessment has two purposes. Some assessments are designed to measure understanding, while others are intended to develop understanding. In both cases, assessment allows students to demonstrate what they have understood thus far and for teachers to decide whether and how to alter their class plans to improve future learning.
- "What is the purpose of grades?" Grades are a method of briefly communicating a student's understanding. They are extremely limited in that they cannot on their own communicate the full story of a student's achievements. One thing is for certain: a grade should not be a punishment or a reward.
- It is important to reconsider these essential questions periodically to ensure that our decisions regarding assessment and grading are pedagogically sound. Take a moment right now-think of a time in your own learning experience when you were given an assignment that

you felt truly allowed you to demonstrate how much you knew. Think of a time when a teacher gave you an assignment that was especially poor at gauging what you understood. Now think about a time when you received a grade that you knew did not accurately reflect your understanding of the course material. Just as we do not need to teach the way that others have taught before us, we do not need to grade and assess in the same ways, either —especially if those ways ultimately do not support our pedagogical goals.

Forms of Assessment

Make sure that students have many different opportunities to demonstrate understanding. Traditional tests and quizzes are obvious, but consider all the other ways that allow you to assess a student and all the possibilities for what a "test" or "exam" might look like: class work, group work, discussions, skits, problem sets, projects, oral work, visual work, written work, etc.

And, make sure to use both formative and summative assessments in your course. Formative assessments help students to develop their understanding. They are quick and give immediate feedback to the student and the teacher. The student finds out where he may be falling short in time to do something about it, and the teacher finds out where he needs to adjust his approach to the material. Strictly speaking, formative assessments should not affect grades, but they should be helpful in measuring progress. Summative assessments are meant to judge a student's understanding at a given moment in time. Most obviously, these are unit exams and final exams. There will be times when an assessment feels like it is both summative and formative, when it seems to be measuring a variety of things. There are, understandably, gray areas, and that's okay.

Grading Student Work

These recommendations concerning grading assessments are based on the belief that a grade is a tool for communication rather than punishment or reward.

- Do not assume that averaging a student's scores is the best way to arrive at his or her grade. This goes along with the first point. Don't let the "math" replace your own common sense and professional judgment.
- Experiment with multiple methods of calculation. Maybe taking the median would be a better reflection of that student's understanding in your course. Or maybe taking another approach to her grade would best communicate her performance. Have a pedagogical reason for why you do what you do with your grades—not just because it is what has always been done.
- Avoid giving zeros at all costs. In fact, if you can, eliminate them all together. This, historically, has been a controversial recommendation. Generally, a grade of zero is primarily used as a severe form of punishment rather than a helpful evaluation tool. On a test, a zero communicates that nothing was understood (a very unlikely situation), when in fact the student may have neglected to make up a test or other work missed due to absence. Additionally, in a traditional grading scheme, a zero will skew an averaged grade disproportionately downward. Any situation in which you initially feel justified in giving a zero is likely to be a situation in which the student needs to be called to responsibility—but this must be done outside the realm of the grade as much as possible. The grade is meant to reflect a student's understanding, which cannot be fairly judged on the basis of no work. The comment is the place for pointing out a student's poor habits.

• Consider dropping extreme grades. This is not unusual; teachers often offer to drop the lowest test score. But maybe the highest score should be dropped, too. The reasoning behind this recommendation is based in the assumption that anything outside the student's normal results might be an anomaly. (This invites the question: How do we justify this recommendation in conjunction with the others above? It always comes down to understanding our students well. You are not required to drop all extreme grades or never to average a student's scores, but you are required to be thoughtful about what you do choose to do, always keeping in mind that a grade is a reflection of understanding.) As always, consult your department chair about departmental policies.

2.2.2 CONSIDER Some Definitions

Formative Assessment - An activity where students and/or teachers check for understanding

Summative Assessment - A culminating test, essay, or project where students show what they have learned with respect to skills and/or content objectives; the result of a summative assessment should never be a surprise to the teacher or the student

Authentic Assessment - An activity where students apply what they have learned to something they have not seen to demonstrate a competency

Rubric - A tool that makes teacher expectations explicit; can be used during project to guide growth and after to assess mastery

ePortfolio - A collection of artifacts that demonstrate milestones and mastery

Grade - A quantitative measure of knowledge/skill acquisition

Standard - What a student should know or be able to do by the end of a lesson, unit, or course; useful as a baseline metric; often described as a goal, objective, or essential question in curriculum mapping or backwards design exercises

Competency - Aptitudes and abilities developed through collective learning experience; competency checkpoints can be measured against rubrics, standards, or grades, but are ultimately qualitative in nature.

2.2.3 EXPLORE Ideas about Assessments

With a basic understanding down, let's explore some resources on assessment strategies. Right now, pick an idea or two to explore. And, we suggest that you bookmark the other links (the ones you don't pick) so that when those topics are relevant during the school year, you have something to refer back to. Happy exploring!!!

Seven Keys to Effective Feedback

This is another classic article from the late, great educator Grant Wiggins. In it, Wiggins offers very practical guidance on what effective feedback looks like fro students. (Source: Grant Wiggins, Seven Keys to Effective Feedback, ASCD, September 2012).

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept12/vol70/num01/Seven-Keysto-Effective-Feedback.aspx

Teachers Going Gradeless

Thoughts on assessing with or without grades. This is a good one to consider, even though most independent schools still use standard grades, in part because it helps teachers frame which types of activities might be "gradeless," and because there are a large number of independent schools that are considering competency based grading rather than score/letter grades. (Source: Arthur Chiaravalli, Teachers Going Gradeless: Toward a Future of Growth Not Grades, Medium, April 2017).

https://medium.com/teachers-going-gradeless/teachers-going-gradeless-50d621c14cad

Formative and Summative Assessment - Want to explore the differences between formative and summative assessment a bit more? Check out this video from Rick Wormeil (2010): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJxFXjfB_B4

Peer Assessment - Peer assessment is a powerful (and probably underused) tool in classrooms. Here, the Cornell University Center for Teaching Innovation breaks down the Why? How? and What? of peer assessment. (Source: Cornell University Center for Teaching Innovation, "Peer Assessment."

https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/assessment-evaluation/peer-assessment Rubrics - Why Use Rubrics? Rubrics are a powerful tool in the hands of teachers and students. On the student side, they empower self-assessment and drive productive peer feedback; on the teacher side, they make expectations clear, promote both horizontal and vertical growth, and at consistency to grading practices. Here are five resources to explore on this topic.

The Role of Rubrics in Advancing and Assessing Student Learning by Wolf and Stevens https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1055646.pdf

Educational Leadership Article: **Using Rubrics to Promote Thinking and Learning** by Heidi Goodrich Andrade

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb00/vol57/num05/Using-Rubrics-to-Promote-Thinking-and-Learning.aspx

The Trouble with Rubrics by Alfie Kohn https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/trouble-rubrics/

RUBRICS (a slideshow) by Peter Gow

https://www.slideshare.net/pgow3/rubrics-overview-presentation

EVALUATION RUBRICS (a how-to slideshow) by Peter Gow https://www.slideshare.net/pgow3/evaluation-rubrics-presentation

2.3 Guidance from Independent School Educators

2.3.1 WATCH Voices from the Field

Now, we'll hear from some experienced educators in independent schools about their classrooms and the culture they try to create.

4 Videos

2.4 EARN YOUR BADGE

In order to earn your badge for this unit, you need to complete one of the "Check Your Understanding" activities and one of the "Apply Your Knowledge" activities. You are more than welcome to do both activities in each category.

Check Your Understanding (Choose one)

2.4.1: IDENTIFY A Muddy Moment

This unit is chocked full of material relating to curriculum, assessments, and grading. We can imagine that some of what was presented may not be as clear as you need it to be at this point. What is that "muddy moment" for you? What could help clarify it?

2.4.2: ASK Peter & Brad

Part of the reason for running this course is to give you a "safe space" to ask questions, to collaborate with colleagues, and to work to enhance your teaching craft. Let's use this discussion board to ask questions. What would be helpful for you at this point to get feedback or ideas on? Do you have a lesson plan that you want feedback on? Do want to post what your draft course expectations are to get feedback on them?

Apply Your Knowledge (Choose one)

2.4.3: CASE STUDY I Don't Get It

Sally is an amazing student in your seventh grade English class. You've been working with her all year to understand parts of speech and grammatical constructs... and she has been struggling with the concepts. One day, she comes to your classroom during a break for extra help, and she breaks down: "I just don't get it... I really don't. And, I don't think that I'm ever going to get it. I've always been a math student. That comes easy. This is just impossible."

How do you respond to Sally? How do you encourage a productive approach?

2.4.4: CONSIDER A Practice to Reconsider

Throughout this unit, we've looked at elements of good, independent school teaching practice. One of these may have given you pause to reflect on your own teaching practice. If so, use this space to describe a practice as you would have done it prior (in one paragraph), and how your practice will change in the future (in one paragraph).

1.0 Overview of Week 3

This Week's Objectives

This week we're going to consider the other really big part of your life as an independent school teacher: what goes on outside the classroom. Many of you expressed excitement and

curiosity about this aspect of independent school work in your introductory posts, and so we're here to help you find your way around the whole campus.

- 1. To understand how complex relationships with families inform and affect our lives as independent school teachers
- 2. To understand how can we optimally support students in all the many contexts of their (and our) lives in and around school
- 3. To understand the range and limits of our relationships within the school community

Module Plan

In order to meet our learning objectives, we have four sections for this unit. The first three are content sections, and the last section is an engagement section. Prepare to spend approximately 2 hours in the content sections, and 2 hours in the engagements.

3.1 Working with Parents & Advising

3.1.1 READ Working with Parents

Families who send their children to independent schools care for them greatly and are invested in their future (in our schools, literally). High parental engagement is wonderful, yet can cause challenges, too.

Read this article to get a sense of what drives these challenges both from the perspective of the teachers and the students.

Michael Thompson, **The Fear Equation**, *Independent School Magazine*:

http://www.fa.org/uploaded/US_Attachments/NAIS_-_Publications_-

Independent_School_Magazine_-_The_Fea.pdf

3.1.2 READ Advising in Schools

At independent schools, teachers and administrators are responsible for much more that covering material in our classrooms. At most schools, teachers are advisors, too. Advisors help students manage the "big picture" of their life at the school -- and this often means some interaction with life outside of school.

Read this article to contemplate the role of the advisor and how deep listening can impact your effectiveness in this role.

Sam Osherson, Paula Chu, Roland Davis, Ellen Porter Honnet, and Janet Sands, **The Teacher** as **Relational Listener**, *Independent School Magazine*

https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-teacher/spring-2012/the-teacher-as-relational-listener/

3.1.3 REVIEW PGP on Parents

Back in Unit 1, we introduced you to the NAIS Principles of Good Practice. Take a few minutes to review the one on working with parents... it may hold a bit different dimension now. https://www.nais.org/learn/principles-of-good-practice/parents-working-with-schools-schools-working-with/

3.2 Working with Students Outside the Classroom

3.2.1 READ Where Do Teachers Do Their Best Work?

In independent schools, learning is not limited to the classroom. In fact, some of the best "teachable moments" happen in hallways, on the sports field, at play practice, in the art studio, or in the dormitory.

Here, Peter Gow reminds of this truth.

https://petergow.com/where-do-teachers-do-their-best-work/

3.2.2 READ Leadership & Coaching

Here are two chapters from Peter's book <u>The Intentional Teacher: Forging a Great Career in the Independent School Classroom</u>. The first addresses advising as well as some of the supervisory/leadership roles a teacher may play. The second addresses athletic (primarily) coaching and is more relevant to the next module. These chapters contain material relevant to both this module and to the next.

An aspect of a teacher's work that is actually all-encompassing has to do with the multiple intersections of social justice, equity, and inclusion. It is important for teachers to see themselves and fully understand their work in this context, and this short post by Peter addresses the challenges schools should be working to take on:

https://www.independentcurriculum.org/the-all-terrain-teacher/

3.2.3 REVIEW PGP on Outside of Classroom Work

Just as with the previous sub-module, it makes sense at this point in the course to go back to the NAIS Principles of Good Practice on some out-of-classroom work.

Review the ones that you have interest in or are relevant to your work.

- Equity and Justice:
- Athletics:
- Global Citizenship:
- Environmental Stewardship:

3.3 Voices from the Field

3.3.1 WATCH Voices from the Field on Work with Students Outside the Classroom

3.4 EARN YOUR BADGE

In order to earn your badge for this unit, you need to complete one of the "Check Your Understanding" activities and one of the "Apply Your Knowledge" activities. You are more than welcome to do both activities in each category.

Check Your Understanding (Optional)

3.4.1 CLARIFY Working with Parents

For many teachers new to independent schools, working with parents (sometimes intensively) to support students in the classroom and through advisory can be a new experience. What questions do you have? What might need to be clarified? Some questions you may have are school-specific, but others might be best to share and explore with your peers in this course.

Apply Your Knowledge (Required)

3.4.2 SYNTHESIZE Experience of This Class

Write a letter to yourself that synthesizes your takeaways from this class. You might set your intentions or offer a plan of action for the fall.

You might list questions you hope will be answered or your plan for coming to know the culture and norms in your new school (or your current school.) You might articulate what you think needs to change in your own practice or name the resources you think you need. Let us know what help we, as a class, might be able to offer you.

- Next, post it (or post the parts you feel you can share) on the discussion board below.
- Respond to at least 2 other letters.

3.5 Course Survey

3.5.1 Course Survey

We're always trying to make this course better, so we'd love to know how this course was for you!

Take 5 minutes to complete this short course survey: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OSPD

With gratitude, Peter & Brad