Ideas for Introducing, Implementing and Sustaining UbD in a School

by Jay McTighe and Andy Greene

The following ideas offer school leaders a set of practical actions that they can take to introduce, initiate and sustain the use of the Understanding by Design® framework (UbD) in their school. The ideas are categorized in terms of:
1) Making the Case, 2) Getting Started, 3) Advancing UbD, 4) Ideas for Meetings, and 5) How to Avoid "Killing" UbD.

You will notice that some of the ideas are followed by a URL for a website. By clicking on this hot link, you will be able to access resources to support the suggested action. Note: If you are unable to access the URLs by clicking on the link, simply copy and paste the link into your browser.

Each idea is preceded by a symbol that can be used to check off ideas that you may wish to try.

> Key: ❏ = actions that can be taken within a school or team
>
> ⭘ = ways in which an external consultant may be used

Making the Case for UbD

It is important for leaders to remember that while they may recognize the value of Understanding by Design, their staff may not see the need for UbD or consider it simply "one more thing." Don't assume that because you or a few teachers believe that UbD is a good idea, everyone will be on board. The following ideas can be used to "make the case" for why a school might consider UbD.

Here are ideas for making the case.

⭘ Engage a consultant to present a ½ or 1-day introductory workshop on UbD to "make the case" or "sow the seeds." Here are available UbD consultants from McTighe and Associates. Click the link to see topics and professional biographies of UbD consultants: http://jaymctighe.com/associates/

❏ Use the UbD Learning Paths from Eduplanet21 to provide staff with an introduction to the key ideas and practices of UbD.
   https://www.eduplanet21.com/understanding-by-design/learning-paths/

❑   Ask: *If UbD is an answer, what problems might it address? … what needs might it help us meet? … what questions can it answer?*

❑   Explore UbD-related Essential Questions in faculty and team meetings; e.g., *How can we teach to all these standards in engaging and effective ways?   What content is worth understanding?   How do we know that students really understand what we teach?   To what extent are our students genuinely engaged in their learning?   How do we raise achievement without "test prep."*

❑   Read and discuss the *Understanding by Design* white paper. Click on this weblink to download the article.
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/UbD-White-Paper.pdf

❑   Read and discuss the paper, *From Common Core Standards to Curriculum: Five Big Ideas*. Click on this weblink to download the article. Click on this weblink to download the article.
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/From-Common-Core-to-Curriculum-5-Big-Ideas-WSASCD.pdf

❑⚪   Have a school/district facilitator or an external consultant engage staff in the "Best Designs for Learning" exercise and list the generalizations that emerge. Have the faculty consider the extent to which characteristics compare to current school practices. We recommend that faculty work in heterogeneous groups (4-6 people) mixed by grade levels and departments.

❑   Have selected staff "shadow a student" for a day and then prepare a written reflection on the experience. Discuss the findings. Ask: How can we make the day-to-day experiences in our school more… *inviting, engaging, meaningful, relevant effective, etc?*   This website offers a Toolkit and protocol for student shadowing:
http://shadowastudent.org/
http://shadowastudent.org/how-it-works

This blog presents an example from a high school teacher who shadowed a student and wrote about her day in the life of that student. This is a great discussion paper for secondary teachers and administrators.
https://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/2014/10/10/a-veteran-teacher-turned-coach-shadows-2-students-for-2-days-a-sobering-lesson-learned/

This blog offers the reflection of a high school vice principal's experience in shadowing a student.
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/one-assistant-principal-learned-shadowing-student-day

❏   Set up a voluntary book study to invite staff to read and discuss the book, or selected chapters of, *Understanding by Design – Expanded 2nd Edition*. Discuss how the ideas could be implemented in our school. Click this link to access the book:

http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetailCross.aspx?ProductId=406

❏   Present a set of Learning Principles and have faculty discuss "what would be seen" in classroom practice if a given principle were enacted (e.g., "Specific and timely feedback enhances learning and performance."). We recommend that faculty work in heterogeneous groups (4-6 people) mixed by grade levels and departments. Click on this weblink to view sample sets of Learning Principles:

https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Learning-Principles-handouts-6.23.18.pdf

Here is an example of a school's learning beliefs:

https://www.wis.edu/academics/core-beliefs-about-learning

❏   Lead faculty or teams in a "visioning" exercise (e.g., a visual depiction of a 21st century school). Share and discuss the various visions. Look for any points of consensus. Ask faculty to identify specific actions that they can take to make the visions come alive.

❏   Administer a student survey to check on students' perceptions of learning (e.g., Is it: *engaging?, relevant?, challenging?, personalized?, etc.* Discuss the results and their implications. The first URL takes you to a student survey developed by Grant Wiggins. The second link provides examples of responses by secondary students to such a survey.

http://www.authenticeducation.org/images/article_files/MS%20Student%20Survey%20Blank.pdf

❏   Collect major assessments from the different grades/departments. Analyze the assessments against Depth of Knowledge (DOK) or Bloom's Taxonomy. Discuss: What do our assessments suggest about what is most valued (e.g., recall, higher order thinking, ability to apply learning, etc.). Here is a description of a school district's action research project involving analyzing classroom assessments.

https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Donegal-Study.pdf

❏   View and discuss short videos that make the case for UbD ideas; (e.g., Teaching for Understanding, Using Essential Questions, Deeper Learning). Provide prompting questions to guide the discussion. Click to access short videos:

http://jaymctighe.com/resources/videos/

❑ Read and discuss the article, "Teaching for Understanding" and compare its suggestions to current school practices. Discuss: *What percentage of our current instruction is focused on Acquisition? ….Meaning Making? …. Transfer?*
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Teaching-for-Understanding.pdf

❑ Have faculty work in grade-level or department teams to analyze student work and achievement data to identify areas where students display misunderstanding or fail to transfer learning. Discuss: *How might we deepen student understanding and ability to apply their learning? How can we avoid such misunderstandings?* Have colleagues in the grade level develop a lesson plan that will help address those misunderstandings. These websites offer protocols for teams to use in examining student work.
https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/collection/protocols-looking-student-work/
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109037/chapters/Protocols-for-Examining-Student-Work.aspx

❑⭕ Have a school/district facilitator or an external consultant engage faculty in an activity that addresses their belief system regarding how students learn. This should be followed by an if/then discussion [e.g., *If* you believe in the value of collaborative learning, *then* what would people see in your classroom?

❑ Send a "scout" team to visit a school/district in the region that has successfully implemented UbD. Have the scout team focus on the positive benefits, questions that may arise, and any interesting points that they observe. Have them report on their visit at a subsequent faculty meeting.

❑ Send a team to attend an introductory workshop on UbD (e.g., local, state or national). You can find a schedule of available UbD workshops at:
http://jaymctighe.com

❑ Some teachers may initially see UbD as simply the latest "new thing" to be piled onto their already overloaded plates. Create a graphic to show how UbD connects with, and supports, other school initiatives. Explain that UbD is not a "program" or a curriculum, but rather a way of thinking and planning.

❑ Honestly address concerns and objections (Yes, buts…) that teachers may have; e.g., *We have too much content to cover to do this. Standardized tests don't pose essential questions or authentic performance tasks. I teach an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course.*

https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Yes-but...-worksheets.pdf

❑ "Unpack" the school's Mission into observable indicators. Then, analyze the extent to which the Mission elements are reflected in current curricula, instruction and assessments. Ask faculty to identify specific actions that they can take to make the Mission come alive. Ask: *What would we need to do more of to address our Mission? What would we need to do less of?*
Click on the link to view an example from a middle school where the faculty identified observable indicators for the district's Mission.

https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/West-Windsor-Middle-School-Indicators.pdf

Getting Started with UbD

Once the staff has been introduced to the key ideas of UbD, there are a number of ways to begin implementation. It is important to note that even for teachers who think that it is a good idea, Understanding by Design can be a demanding planning framework. Therefore, leaders are encouraged to "think big, start small and go for early wins." It is important not to overwhelm teachers as the UbD initiative is launched. School leaders are encouraged to strive to create a "no fault" environment in which teachers can work on implementing UbD without fear of negative evaluations.

Here are ideas for getting started slowly and beginning the implementation of Understanding by Design.

⭕ Contract with an expert consultant to lead/facilitate a 3-4 day workshop series for staff on UbD unit design. Possible schedules:

- during faculty planning days in advance of a new school year

- during regularly scheduled P.D. days

- in summer workshops

- for credit in after-school or Saturday sessions

- using substitutes to free up teachers during the school year

Click the link to see topics and professional biographies of UbD consultants who can lead these workshops:

http://jaymctighe.com/associates/

❑ Distribute examples of well-designed units for staff to analyze. Have teachers select and teach a previously-developed UbD units. Discuss noteworthy features of the units based on UbD Design Standards. Sample UbD units and the Design Standards are available from this book:
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109107.aspx

Excellent collections of UbD units are available from the Massachusetts Dept. of Education and from the Colorado Department of Education. (Note: You will have to sign up to gain free access to over 100 UbD units, pre-K to grade 12.)
http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/download_form.aspx

❑ Invite teachers to select (or adapt) one of the reviewed units to implement.

❑ Begin with a select group of willing faculty members. Have them design and pilot UbD units. Share (positive) results with the rest of the staff. You might offer incentive grants and/or release time to teachers interested in exploring UbD. Purchase the *Understanding by Design Guides* to support them in developing a draft UbD unit.
http://shop.ascd.org/Default.aspx?TabID=55&ProductId=123054384&Understanding-by-Design-Guide-Set-(2-books)

Note: If possible, encourage the "early adopters" to work with a partner or team.

❑ Purchase the *Eduplanet21 UbD Unit Planner* for all staff (or volunteers) to use in drafting a UbD unit. Get further information at this website:
https://www.eduplanet21.com/curriculum-design/

❑ Design a sample UbD unit together as a faculty on a familiar topic to model the UbD thinking process ; e.g., Pledge of Allegiance, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech, Argumentation."

❑ Have faculty act as "peer reviewers" for a unit that is not designed using UbD (e.g., Prairie Day described in the UbD book). Invite them to use the UbD Design Standards to suggest appropriate edits to improve the unit design.

❑ View videotapes of teachers using UbD units in their classrooms. Discuss what was observed; e.g., student engagement, ways the teachers are facilitating meaning making and transfer, not just covering knowledge and skills; the nature of student work). A set of classroom videos is available on the Teaching Channel, as well as from the Massachusetts Dept. of Education. Click this link to access the Massachusetts and Teaching Channel videos:

http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/download_form.aspx
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos

❏ Set up a voluntary book study to invite staff to read and discuss the book, *Understanding by Design – Expanded 2nd Edition.* Discuss how the ideas could be implemented in our school. Click this link to access the book:
http://shop.ascd.org/ProductDetailCross.aspx?ProductId=406

◯ Focus initially on one aspect of UbD (e.g., Essential Questions, Performance Tasks) and sponsor a design workshop on that topic. The UbD Design Guides provide excellent resources. The two Design Guides provide excellent resources. (See URLs above.)
http://shop.ascd.org/Default.aspx?TabID=55&ProductId=123054384&Understanding-by-Design-Guide-Set-(2-books)

Provide teachers with a Quick Reference Guide to Essential Questions (EQs) and ask them to add EQs to their instruction.
http://shop.ascd.org/Default.aspx?TabID=55&ProductId=195433354&Designing-and-Using-Essential-Questions-(Quick-Reference-Guide)

❏ Provide opportunities for staff to design and share UbD units. For example, schedule unit design time as part of team or PLC meetings or on P.D. days. Hire "rotating substitutes" to free up teacher teams for part of the day.

❏ ◯ Offer an introductory presentation for parents, Board members, and even students (when appropriate) to introduce the key ideas of UbD and the reasons for adopting it. You may wish to use an external consultant.

Advancing UbD

Like a garden, any major school initiative, such as UbD, requires constant attention – watering, fertilizing and weeding. Here are some ideas for supporting, sustaining, and advancing UbD in your school.

❏ Have a group of teachers who teach the same grade level/subject area design a unit that one of the teachers will teach. Have the other team members give feedback about the unit after they observe a lesson or two.

❏ ◯ Conduct peer reviews of locally designed units against UbD Design Standards. A consultant can be hired to teach and facilitate this process.
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Peer-Review-Process-2.0.pdf

❑ Engage content and UbD experts to review and give feedback on draft UbD units against UbD Design Standards. MAC consultants can conduct curriculum reviews.
<p align="center">http://jaymctighe.com/associates/</p>

❑ Work in grade level, department or PLC teams to develop common performance tasks and scoring rubrics.

❑ Work in grade level, department or PLC teams to review and evaluate student work on common performance tasks using agreed-upon rubrics. Select school/district-wide "anchors" for the rubrics. These websites offer protocols for teams to use in examining student work.
<p align="center">https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/collection/protocols-looking-student-work/
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109037/chapters/Protocols-for-Examining-Student-Work.aspx</p>

❑ Click here to download a related article, *Making the Most of PLCs*.
<p align="center">https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Making-the-Most-of-PLCs.pdf</p>

❑ Work on an agreed set of Learning Principles related to UbD. (For example, *We agree to use authentic tasks on a regular basis.*). Click on this link to see examples and a process for engaging staff in discussing and identifying such principles:
<p align="center">https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Learning-Principles-handouts-6.23.18.pdf</p>

Here is an example of a school's learning beliefs:
<p align="center">https://www.wis.edu/academics/core-beliefs-about-learning</p>

❑ Set up collegial learning walks – non-evaluative classroom walk-throughs targeting specific aspects of UbD. Teachers visit the classrooms of their colleagues (who volunteer to be visited) to observe instructional practices, speak with students about their learning and then reflect on the experience. In preparation, read the is paper and view the associated video.
Paper: https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Collegial-Learning-Walks-Powerful-Tools-for-Instructional-Leadership.pdf
Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnU7sJt5ZbI&feature=youtu.be

Here is a protocol for organizing learning walks in your school:
https://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/learning_

walk_protocol_nti0214.pdf

❏ Administrators, coaches and mentors can use the *Indicators of Teaching and Assessing for Understanding* (T4U) classroom "walk throughs" and give

feedback to teachers. You can also engage a UbD consultant to visit classrooms to offer feedback on instructional practices.
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Observable-indicators-Teaching-for-Understanding.pdf

❏ Show video clips of teaching episodes and have staff act as evaluators using the T4U indicators as if they were giving feedback to the teacher. Here are sources of classroom videos:
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos
http://www.teachertube.com/browse

❏ Use a "backward design" to structure teacher observations. Click this link for a sample protocol:
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Using-Backward-Design-to-Structure-Observations.pdf

◯ Engage a UbD consultant to observe classes of teachers who volunteer. After the visit, have a "processing" session with the teacher volunteers.

◯ Engage a UbD consultant to offer UbD workshops on advanced topics (e.g., UbD and differentiation; formative assessment; inquiry-based teaching) or for specific subject areas (e.g., UbD in Mathematics, World Languages). Click the link to see areas of expertise and professional biographies of MAC consultants:
http://jaymctighe.com/associates/

❏ Invite knowledgeable faculty members to offer workshops on various UbD topics (e.g., *Using Essential Questions; Leading a Socratic Seminar; Designing Authentic Tasks; Building a Better Rubric; Involving Students in Self and Peer Assessment*) during a faculty meeting or on a P.D. day. Allow teachers to sign up for the workshop of their choosing given by their colleagues.

❏ Communicate your vision and implementation efforts as a multi-year plan to staff, parents, and community. Revisit and remind people of the goals and where you are in the process at various points in time. Create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to address common questions and predictable concerns. Use your school/district website to share updates on progress and highlight exciting milestones.

❑   Introduce new teachers and administrators to the UbD framework as part of their induction or mentoring process. Consider using the UbD Learning Paths from Eduplanet21.
https://www.eduplanet21.com/understanding-by-design/learning-paths/

❑   Invite teachers to propose an Action Research project related to UbD. Provide support (e.g., release time) to enable the implementation of the idea(s). Report on the findings at a future staff meeting. Click the link to see ideas for action research projects:
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Action-Research-Ideas.pdf

❑   Frame key initiatives or issues around Essential Questions. Click the link to see examples:
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Essential-Questions-for-Educators.pdf

❑   "Walk the Talk" by applying the "backward design" process explicitly to major school initiatives. Click the link to download a backward design template with several examples:
https://www.jaymctighe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SbD-Template-w-Directions.pdf

❑   Seek local, state, federal and foundation grants to support continued UbD implementation.

❑   Celebrate success and progress by showcasing UbD work on school/district website, at board meetings, etc.

❑   Engage administrators, curriculum leaders, and/or teacher leaders to keep momentum going by making connections to UbD through their daily conversations with teachers.

❑   Other: _____

Ideas for Meetings – Faculty, Grade-level, Department and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

❑   Begin faculty, grade-level, department and committee meetings with an essential question.

❑   Invite individual teachers, teams (e.g., 4th grade) or departments (e.g., Science) to briefly describe a UbD "success" that they have experienced since the last meeting.

❑   Invite individual teachers to bring and present examples of (impressive) student work from an authentic performance task that they used.

❑   Highlight one element of UbD (e.g., Essential Questions, Authentic Performance Tasks, Facets of Understanding) at each meeting. For example, have teachers share EQs that they are currently using or describe impressive student performance on a task.

❑   Purchase the DVD on Essential Questions DVD from ASCD. Choose a few segments to show and discuss. Click on this link to access many appropriate articles:

<div align="center">http://tinyurl.com/zhfu4l4</div>

❑   Send a short UbD-related article in advance to read. Provide prompting questions to guide the discussion at the meeting. Click on this link to access many appropriate articles:

<div align="center">http://jaymctighe.com/resources/articles/</div>

❑   View and discuss short videos that explore key UbD ideas; (e.g., Teaching for Understanding, Using Essential Questions, Deeper Learning, Formative Assessment). Provide prompting questions to guide the discussion. Click on this link to access short videos:

<div align="center">http://jaymctighe.com/resources/videos/</div>

❑   Show video clips of teaching episodes not aligned with UbD and have staff act as observers in terms of giving the teacher feedback in a "post-observation" meeting. *Teacher Tube* and the *Teaching Channel* have hundreds of classroom videos that could be used.

<div align="center">https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos
http://www.teachertube.com/browse</div>

❑ Other: _____

How not to Kill UbD - by Design

How to Kill UbD - by Design	Tips to Avoid Killing UbD
1. Mandate that every teacher must use UbD for all of their planning immediately (without sufficient training, on- going support, or structured planning time).	Think big, but start small. For example: • Work with volunteers at first • Ask teachers to plan just one UbD unit per semester for starters. • Encourage teachers to work with a colleague or team, and begin with a familiar unit topic. • Provide some designated planning time.
2. Assume that staff members understand the need for UbD and/or will naturally welcome it. In other words, prescribe UbD as an "answer" or "solution" when staff do not see or own the "problem."	Establish the need for a change (e.g., analysis of performance data or staff/ student surveys) before proposing a prescription. Make sure that staff see UbD as an appropriate response to a need that they recognize and own.
3. Introduce UbD as this year's focus, suggesting that UbD can be fully implemented in a year and that it bears no relation to last year's initiative. (This practice can foster a "This too shall pass" attitude in staff.)	Develop and publish a multi-year plan to show how UbD will be slowly and systematically implemented as part of a larger strategic plan, not simply this years' "new thing."
4. Attempt to implement too many initiatives simultaneously (e.g., UbD, Differentiated Instruction, Curriculum Mapping, Brain-based Learning, Professional Learning Communities).	Develop a 1-page graphic (e.g. limbs of a tree, pieces of a puzzle, supports of a building, etc.) showing how the various school/district initiatives are interconnected. Use "backward design" to plan all major school initiatives.

5. Offer one introductory workshop on UbD and assume that teachers now have the ability to implement it well.	Design a long-term professional development program "backward" from your goals. Then, develop a plan for the year (workshops, study groups, action research, etc.) to develop staff competence and confidence with UbD.
6. Provide UbD training for teachers, but not for administrators, OR give administrators and supervisors the same training as teachers.	Establish parallel tracks of training for administrators in which they learn how to supervise and support UbD; e.g., how to conduct in-class "look-fors," establish peer reviews of units, form PLC teams for peer review, etc.
7. Provide minimal UbD training for a few teachers in a Train-the-Trainers program and then expect immediate and effective turn-key training of all other staff.	Invest in cultivating expertise in a team. Engage staff in exploring UbD through study groups using essential questions, examining performance data, etc. Consider using outside experts/ consultants to launch UbD when necessary.
8. Train people in Stage 1 for the first year, Stage 2 in year 2, then Stage 3 in Year 3.	Introduce UbD as a "whole." Begin by working on elements in all three stages (e.g., EQs for Stage 1, Performance Tasks for Stage 2).
9. Announce that UbD is the official way to plan, and from now on, teachers are expected to use the UbD template to plan each and every lesson.	Make clear that the UbD framework is designed for unit and course design, not for planning individual lessons. Encourage teacher teams to agree on Desired Results (Stage 1) and Evidence (Stage 2), then allow teachers some freedom in how they develop and write lessons (Stage 3).
10. Standardize UbD implementation. Do not permit alternatives or different approaches to learning and implementing UbD.	Differentiate UbD implementation as appropriate; e.g., allow different departments and grade-level teams some options for actions and timelines.