

## Backwards Design: Developing a Common Vocabulary

Three terms in particular guide educative project and lesson planning. Their purposes vary only slightly, but each slight difference provides a necessary perspective from which to design the lesson or project plan.

- **GOAL:** A goal is what you, the teacher, want to happen because of this lesson. Examples:
  - Introduce the origin of the mitzvot.
  - Create a new lulav-shaking ceremony.
  - Review the story of Passover.
- **OBJECTIVE:** An objective is what the students will be able to **do** because of this lesson. These are often stated as, “By the end of the lesson, students should be able to...” (Which I tend to shorten to BTEOTLSSBAT). These should be observable in some way. Examples of objectives:
  - BTEOTLSSBAT define “mitzvah” in their own words.
  - BTEOTLSSBAT list the four species in the lulav and the body parts they represent: palm (spine), eucalyptus (eyes), willow (lips), and etrog (heart).
  - BTEOTLSSBAT create a collage of images about Passover and explain the choices they made.
- **ENDURING UNDERSTANDING (EU):** The EU is a statement of the general principle you want the students to learn from this lesson. It’s related to the concept of a “big idea” but goes a bit deeper, and yet should be as succinct as possible. Examples:
  - Some mitzvot, commandments, come from the Torah and others come from the rabbis’ commentaries on the Torah.
  - The lulav and etrog serve as ritual symbols of God’s presence, our inner strength, and the Israelites’ survival in the wilderness.
  - Passover celebrates our journey to freedom from slavery under the Egyptians.

A typical lesson or project would probably have 1-2 EUs, 1-4 Objectives, and 1-3 Goals.

If a project takes multiple sessions, the EU should be the same for every session (hence “enduring”), while the Objectives and Goals might change.

The order listed increases in creative complexity: goals are the usually the simplest to write well because it’s easy to think of what we want accomplished from our own perspective, while EUs ought to be fine-tuned like poetry, to express the most pivotal concept(s) of the learning, from the learner’s perspective rather than our own, in as succinct a phrase as possible. Many lesson planning methods go through them in that order. **However, in Backwards Design, we do the reverse:** after all, the objectives must stem *from* the EUs, because you can’t really visualize what the students should be able to accomplish until you figure out what you want them to know. The goals, then, must also stem *from* those objective and EUs in tandem: what you want accomplished can truly only be achieved if the knowledge and creative elements are already in place.

For example, for my Mezuzah Workshop, which takes three sessions to complete:

Session 1:

- EU: The mezuzah serves as a beautiful reminder of the mitzvot in pursuit of loving God and *hiddur mitzvah*.
- Objectives: BTEOTLSSBAT...
  - o Name at least two components of a mezuzah (shin, leans into the room, holds a scroll of the Sh'ma/V'ahavta, etc.)
  - o Define "hiddur mitzvah" as "beautifying the commandment"
  - o Express an opinion on why it's important for a mezuzah to be beautiful
  - o Create a clay mezuzah case
- Goals:
  - o Introduce the concept of hiddur mitzvah
  - o Orient students to the elements that go into a mezuzah's design
  - o Begin the mezuzah creation process and complete the case.

Session 2:

- EU: The mezuzah serves as a beautiful reminder of the mitzvot in pursuit of loving God and *hiddur mitzvah*.
- Objectives: BTEOTLSSBAT...
  - o Name at least one mitzvah the scroll inside the mezuzah reminds us to do to show our love ("V'ahavta") for God
  - o Create at least one personal reminder to add to the scroll for their own mezuzah
  - o "Scribe" that personal reminder in calligraphy
- Goals:
  - o Convey the purpose of the mezuzah as a reminder of the mitzvot in the Sh'ma/V'ahavta
  - o Apply the reminder concept to the students' own lives
  - o Create a line of calligraphy to be scanned and added to the end of a traditional scroll text, shrunk, and printed for next session

Session 3 (with families):

- EU: The mezuzah serves as a beautiful reminder of the mitzvot in pursuit of loving God and *hiddur mitzvah*.
- Objectives: BTEOTLSSBAT...
  - o Explain to parents why we put up a mezuzah, what it contains, and why beauty is important in the mezuzah
  - o Create a new family blessing based on the student's new reminder line to add to the mezuzah affixing ritual
  - o Affix the mezuzah on a classroom door as a family and perform their new ritual
- Goals:
  - o Engage parents and children in taking ownership of the mezuzah ritual

## Semi-Backwards Design: Project Planning Worksheet

Enduring Understanding: If my students walk away knowing one general principle, it should be...

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Objectives: What should the students be able to do by the end of the lesson?

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Goals: What do I, the teacher, want to accomplish with this lesson?

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Assessment: How will I know the students learned?

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Framing: What information or ideas should students have access to before beginning the project?

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Set Induction: How will I pique the students' interest and bring them into the lesson? (in 2 minutes or less!)

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Project Parameters: To accomplish all this, the "rules" of the project should be...

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