

The Case for Curriculum Development

Consider the four vignettes and what they suggest about understanding and the design of curriculum and assessments.

Each of these vignettes reveals
some troubling aspect of
understanding and design.

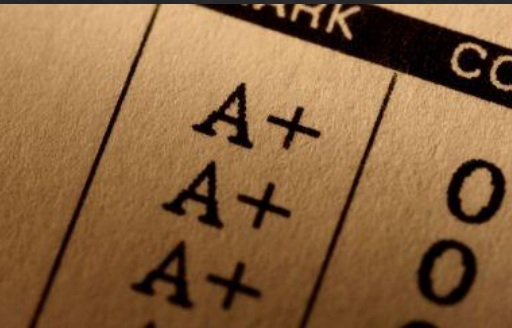
Vignette 1

Straight A's

As part of a workshop on 'understanding,' an experienced English college instructor entered the following reflection in a learning log about her own experience as a college student:

"I felt then that my brain was a way station for material going in one ear and 9after the test) out the other. I could memorize every easily and so became a straight A student, but I was embarrassed even then that I understood much less than some other students who cared less about grades".

Straight A's



- Even 'good' students don't always have deep understanding despite conventional measures certifying success
- Testing predominantly focused on recall of info

Apples

For two weeks every fall, all the 3rd grade classes participate in a unit on apples. The 3rd graders engage in a variety of activities related to the topic. In language arts, they read about Johnny Appleseed and view an illustrated filmstrip of the story. They each write a creative story involving an apple and then illustrate their stories using tempera paints. In art, students collect leaves from nearby crab apple trees and make a giant leaf-print collage that hangs on the hallway bulletin board adjacent to the 3rd grade classrooms. The music teacher teaches the children songs about apples. In science, they use their senses to carefully observe and describe the characteristics of different types of apples. During math, the teacher demonstrates how to scale up an applesauce receipt to make enough for all the 3rd graders.

A highlight of the unit is the field trip to a local apple orchard, where students watch cider being made and go on a hayride. The culminating unit activity is the 3rd grade apple fest, a celebration in which parents dress in apple costumes and the children rotate through various activities at stations – making applesauce, competing in an apple word search contest, bobbing for apples, and completing a math skill sheet containing word problems involving apples. The fest concludes with selected students reading their apple stories while the entire group enjoys candy apples.

Apples



- activity-oriented curriculum – engaging but what is the value of the work?
- What are the big ideas and important skills to be developed during the unit?
- To what extent does the evidence of learning (leaf-print collage, stories, word searches) reflect worthwhile content standards?

Math

A math standardized test item presented the following problem as an open ended prompt demanding a written answer:

“How many buses does the army need to transport 1,128 soldiers if each bus holds 36 soldiers?”

Almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents gave the following answer:

“31 remainder 12”.

Math

$$\begin{array}{r} 34 \\ 2 \overline{)68} \\ \underline{-6} \\ 08 \end{array}$$

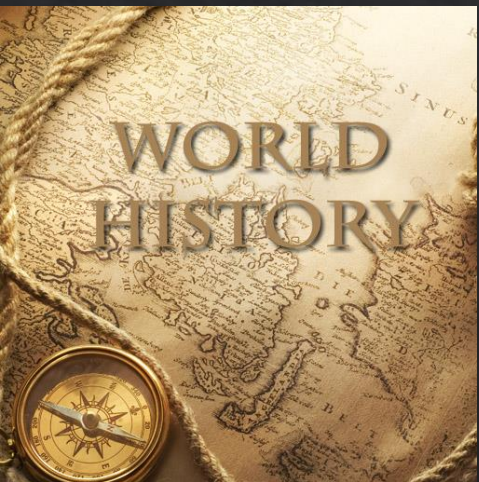
$4 \times 2 = 8$

- Although students computed accurately, they had not grasped the meaning of the question
- Could it be that these students had mastered the out-of-context drill problems but had been given little opportunity to apply math to real world applications?
- Should we conclude that the students who answered 'remainder 12' really understand division and its use?

History

It's late March and the panic is beginning to set in. A quick calculation reveals to the world history instructor that he will not finish the textbook unless he covers an average of 40 pages per day until the end of school. He decides, with some regret, to eliminate a short unit on Latin America and several time-consuming activities, such as a mock UN debate and vote and discussions of current international events in relation to the world history topics they've studied. To prepare his students for the departmental final exam, it will be necessary to switch into a fast-forward lecture mode.

History



- A *coverage* orientation – march through the textbook irrespective of priorities, desired results, learner needs and interests, or apt assessment evidence – may defeat its own aims, for what do students remember, much less understand, when there is only *teaching* with no opportunity to really *learn* – to work with, play with, investigate, use – the key ideas and points of connection

Twin Sins of Design

Activity-focused teaching

*“hands on without being
minds on”*

Coverage-focused teaching

*“teach, test, and hope for the
best”*

Where should our teaching be focused then?

Key Questions at the heart of effective *Learning*

- What is important here?
- What is the point?
- What does this help us understand or be able to do?
- To what does this relate?
- Why should we learn this?

Ok, so, we should be learning-focused in our teaching.

Therefore, we must ask:

How do we make it more likely – by our design – that more students really understand what they're asked to learn?

Because, all teachers are designers.

What are you designing for?

Curriculum Development is about *designing the learning experience for engaging and effective learning.*

Where do we start?



“To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right directions”

- Stephen Covey

TELOS

Greek for ‘the end at which we aim’ – so what are you aiming at?



What is the end at which an acorn aims?



How about a hammer – the end at which it aims is...

Ok, so how do you apply this to your curriculum design? With Backwards Design

Backwards Design



1. Identify
desired results

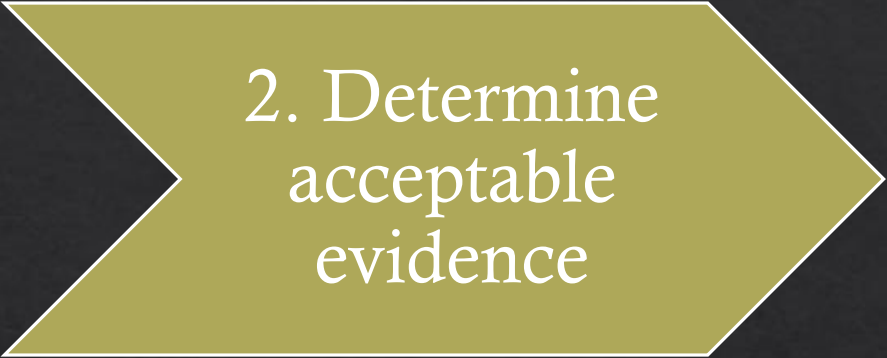
2. Determine
acceptable
evidence

3. Plan
learning
experiences
and instruction



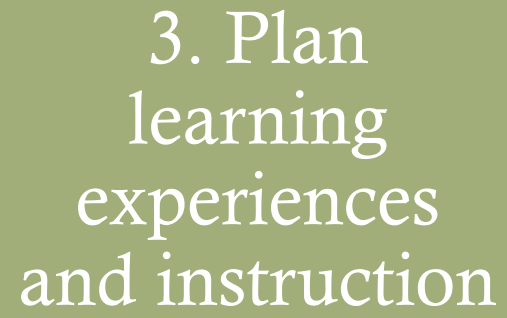
1. Identify desired results

- Established Goals
- Understandings
- Essential Questions
- Head, Heart and Hands



2. Determine acceptable evidence

- Performance Tasks
- Other Evidence



3. Plan learning experiences and instruction

- Learning Activities
- WHERE TO