

My artistic shelf

Made with no regrets, whatsoever

RACHELAULT JUL 26, 2018 02:11AM

Curriculum Design - A Refresher

A Refresher

Curriculum is designed to improve student learning. When designing curriculum, there are important considerations to address, not the least of which is its organization. A horizontal organization blends curriculum elements and a vertical organization refers to the sequencing of curriculum elements (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Curriculum is created with a specific purpose in mind. There are three basic types of curriculum design:

1. Subject-Centered Design
2. Learner-Centered Design
3. Society/Problem-Centered Design

Learner-Centred Design

Learner-Centered/Based design emphasizes curriculum that focuses on the learner. Through this design curriculum is organized around the needs and interests of students and should be valuable to their life. Students become active members in the education process, helping select and organize the purposes for learning (Sowell, 2005). The primary goal of this design is to ensure curriculum is meaningful to students.

Planning

When planning under the Learner-Centered Design, teachers are planning with the student in mind. Educational plans for instruction and assessment should focus on helping children to become better learners, improving morale in schools, and teaching all students to the best of their ability. When students graduate from high school they will leave with the capacity for self-confidence, optimism, and high self-esteem (Hayes, 2003).

One method of planning that has become more popular and relevant under the Learner-Centered Design is called Backwards Planning or Backwards Design. Backward Design, in terms of planning, focuses on “what do we want students to be able to know, value, understand, and do?” (Hayes, 2003). Through this planning model the teacher determines what to teach and assess before deciding how. This allows students the opportunity to become involved, negotiate, and clarify what is expected of them throughout the learning process. This involvement in the planning process gives students more ownership over their learning and can lead to great engagement and overall academic success.

Inquiry-Based Learning in the Classroom

Inquiry-based learning is an approach to teaching and learning that places students' questions, ideas and observations at the center of the learning experience. Through Inquiry-based learning, students pick a problem or topic that is of interest to them. Since students direct their own learning, teachers can only plan so much! Instead of "planning", teachers must find a way to tie the projects to the curriculum. Inquiry-based projects hit a variety of curriculum/subjects together. Teachers must plan their assessments using a variety of different rubrics (not just a single test).

Instruction

The Principles of Cognitive and Sociocultural Learning and Motivation (McMillan, 2014) states teachers must teach and assess in alignment with what they know about how children learn and what motivates them. When teachers instruct their lesson, building on students' prior knowledge, life experiences, backgrounds, and interests, students are more likely to be engaged and find relevance and meaning in the new information.

Instruction based on the Learner-Centered Design requires teachers to use differentiating instruction. Teachers will present the same material to all students using a variety of teaching tools and strategies. Teachers consider different learning styles, interests, and abilities when instructing their lesson.

Assessment

“Assessment that enhances learning is as important as assessment that documents learning” (McMillan, 2014). Students can be placed in the center of planning, instruction, and assessment. Teachers can involve students in the assessment process, have them help develop rubrics and decide what a “fair” grade would require. Once students have some ownership over the marking they will become more invested in the assignment. When teachers focus on the learner during the process of assessment they give frequent feedback that is informative, specific, and meaningful. This type of constant assessment is called formative assessment. It allows students to see where they are currently in terms of the goal or expectation and it informs them of the steps to take next.

Feedback that is constant and personalized is more likely to happen in a learner-centered design. The resulting benefits to the students are evident through improvement in attitudes, confidence and skill attainment.

Ursula Franklin

<http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/ufa/>

According to their website, The Ursula Franklin Academy (UFA) shows some connection to a Learner-Centered Curriculum Design.

“Our community welcomes and values diversity among our students, not only culturally, but also in terms of learning styles, recognizing that our differences

enrich our learning”

Problem-Centred Design

Problem-centered design emphasizes curriculum that focuses on real-life problems of individuals and society. It can be broken up into two categories 1) life situations and 2) reconstructionist. Through this design, curriculum should be relevant to the students' social life and connected to their community. It's primary goal is to improve society through the direct involvement of the schools and their students (Sowell, 2005).

Planning

Planning, under a Society/Problem-Based Design, focus on local concerns, not the individual students. “When students leave schools they should have: the capacity to think and be active informed citizens, employment-related skills (Hayes, 2003). When planning, teachers should consider local concerns about what counts as educational goals and indicators of learning. Everything in “the plan” should be based upon improving society.

21st Century Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

McMillan (2014) identified 21st Century Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions to be one factor influencing classroom assessment. When planning for instruction, teachers must consider these "essential" learning outcomes for students:

- Deep understanding of fundamental concepts of important content areas and disciplines
- Cognitive skills such as problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and metacognition
- Creativity and innovative thinking
- Effective communication skills
- Effective social skills
- Global understanding and perspectives
- Dispositions such as responsibility, flexibility, self-direction, determination, perseverance, risk taking, and integrity

Instruction

When instructing lessons under a Society/Problem-Based Curriculum design, teachers are attempting to reference society throughout their lessons and activities. Hayes (2003) calls for authentic instruction through which student learning is focused on the construction of knowledge, utilizing disciplined inquiry, and with value beyond school.

Assessment

Assessment under a Society/Problem-Based Design would not provide choice for individual students to express their understanding. If the goal is to prepare students to become active and productive members of society, teachers will assess this ability.

Ursula Franklin Academy

On the Ursula Franklin Academy website, the mandate is to prepare students for the future and for a changing world.

Subject-Centred Design

Curriculum organization is guided by subject-specific material with little overlap between disciplines. This design relies heavily on teacher involvement through direct instruction, thereby 'deemphasizing' the learner. (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013)

Planning

This approach is the one that is most likely familiar to a great deal of us in the course. The teacher makes most curricular decisions, using the documents as the guide for instruction. Subject-matter design is organized such that the educator deems what is important and disseminates that information to the students. Broad-Fields and Discipline design attempt to mitigate the singularity of subject matter design by combining similar subjects into broader subject areas (Orstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Instruction

Teaching from a subject-matter perspective lends itself to the notion of teachers as subject specialists (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

This method relies on verbal activities from the educator and listening skills on behalf of the students. As Ornstein & Hunkins attest in the subject model 'teachers still have to assume an active role in lecturing, direct instruction, recitation and large-group discussion' (2013).

Textbook use is high in this model, which believes in a prescribed linear approach to teaching. Lessons are planned and executed one after the other with little to no room for navigating 'off course' to explore issues or topics that might spark the interest of the student population.

Assessment

Assessment in this design is based on prior knowledge. Formative assessments which gather information about prior knowledge which are then used to inform instruction. Typically, testing following a unit is a common method of assessment. Depending on the discipline being taught, essays and short answer questions are also used. This allows for a wider breadth of information to be covered, and for the students to demonstrate a greater sense of understanding and thinking skills.

Indigenizing the Curriculum

"Aboriginal pedagogy and epistemology need to permeate the atmosphere of classrooms, while simultaneously welcoming all learners, regardless of cultural background." (Claypool & Preston, 2011) Aboriginal students are underrepresented in schools and classrooms today. Aboriginal students are more disengaged and statistics show their drop out rate is nearly twice as high as non-Aboriginal students. The article, A call to personal research: Indigenizing your curriculum (2017), indicates an urgent need to improve the educational experience for our Aboriginal students. The first step is to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, culture, knowledge, and innovations into our curriculum.

Planning

“Start where you are with what you have.” Here are some ways to include Aboriginal perspectives in the educational plan:

- a) Reach out to local Indigenous communities and start a dialogue that privileges place-based education. Elders are a valuable resource and can provide stories and history of the community.
- b) Notice the problems, disparities, and injustices in your own community and facilitate inquiry-based learning in the classroom to respond to these issues.
- c) Acknowledge the role of intergenerational trauma and engaging appropriate processes such as Circles that encourage deep and respectful listening and give voice to each student.
- d) Do not over-generalize information so that the diversity of First Nations and Metis in Canada is respected.

Instruction

To incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and connections into day-to-day teaching, teachers can use the following strategies for instruction:

- Talking Circles
- Elders/Aboriginal guest speakers
- Medicine Wheel teachings
- Culturally relevant stories
- Use of hands on manipulatives
- Provide opportunities for group work
- Create links to the community and nature

Assessment

To ensure assessment meets the needs of Aboriginal students (and all other students regardless of culture and background) teachers should provide frequent formative assessment. Students should also be given opportunity to engage in discussion about their expectations and be included in the building of the rubric/assessment. Assessment should be fair, transparent, learning-goal orientated, and should accommodate any special learning needs (McMillan, 2014). Indigenizing assessment requires teachers to involve students in the assessment process and allow them to display their knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways.

Our Questions

1. Personally having no experience with a school, curriculum, or assessment piece where a Society/Problem-Centered Design was used I am curious to know if you have? What were the pros and cons of your experience?

2. Do you think yearly PD, focusing on Aboriginal education should be mandatory for school staff members?

3. In the Finnish system there are no mandatory exams until high school seniors are applying to university. Do you think such a system could exist in Canada?

Personal Perspectives

Rachel

I began my teaching career 17 (!) years ago and taught my students in the manner that I was taught by my teachers (and for that matter, the way that I was taught to teach!). My understanding of curriculum was limited in the sense that I didn't think outside the box, or more accurately, the curriculum documents that we were given when we were hired.

Moving into a kindergarten classroom from the 'grades' really shifted my entire perspective on my role as an educator. In kindergarten there is more freedom to move within guidelines set out in our document and I believe that this is for 2 reasons.

The first is that the very name of our document is not a curriculum, but instead a program. The constraints and pressures that are felt within other curriculum based programs are not as evident as they are in the 1-12 system. We have loose guidelines that we work towards (e.g., students will leave kindergarten reading at a level 6) but it is widely accepted that there are such large ranges in development, that this is not possible, or even appropriate, for all students who leave kindergarten.

The second is that the program itself is non-evaluative, at least in the traditional sense. There are no grades, either letter or number, to assign to a child, instead there are large spaces on the report card to write about the child and how they are

developing. I like to think of it as a story of how the student is growing, changing and acquiring skills, but only as they are measured against themselves. We observe how they are changing with this loose framework. This allows time and energy for the educator to really get to know the students and to see more clearly the links between developmental areas. It further allows for the educator to infuse areas that students enjoy with areas that they need to work on. For example, when I have a student that loves to build, but does not enjoy writing, I can engage the student in a writing activity about their building, perhaps by encouraging them to design and create a new structure.

I have loosely adopted a Reggio approach to my style of teaching. I like to say that my style is 'Reggio-inspired' and that I am drawing on its influence. Here is a short video that I feel outlines the basic principles of this approach.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvwpLarbUD8>

Teaching in this way is very much a practice, and I feel that I have many things to learn as I go. However, I believe that this approach gives me a great grounding in a learner centred design that works hard to put my students first.

Chelsey

While I am most familiar with teaching from a Subject-Centered Design model, I do feel as though my planning, instruction, and assessment focus more on the Learner. Indigenizing the curriculum is the area that I found most interesting throughout this assignment. There are two connections to my professional life that I would like to share with you:

1. Kenanow Bachelor of Education Program

<https://www.ucn.ca/sites/academics/facultyeducation/programs/bacheloreducation/Pages/Kenanow-Bachelor-of-Education-Program.aspx>

I received my Bachelor of Education from the University College of the North in The Pas, Manitoba. "The Kenanow Bachelor of Education is a northern-based and Aboriginal-focused teacher education program. The program melds the wisdom and guidance provided by Elders in northern Manitoba with the certification standards and academic expectations of Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning." Upon

graduation, teachers will be aware and responsive to the needs of ALL their students. I was introduced to many Aboriginal teaching methods and perspectives during my time at UCN. Perhaps my favourite assignment required us to go out into the bush and teach a lesson using the land. This meant we had to teach without the internet, a whiteboard, or even desks to sit in. I try to remember this experience when I am planning for my students. Their knowledge does not always have to be shown on paper, they can express their understanding in a variety of ways. For example, students may choose to use blocks or whiteboards in math or perhaps they will use rocks and sticks for manipulatives instead.

2. Saskatchewan Curriculum

<https://www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/Home?language=en>

I am currently entering my fifth year teaching in Creighton, Saskatchewan. Like most teachers, I find curriculum can be frustrating to work with at times. However, I am very grateful for the Aboriginal perspectives and resources component of the Saskatchewan Curriculum. I will share an example from Grade 1 Science: When studying the weather we focus on the outcome: "Compare and represent daily and seasonal changes of natural phenomena through observing, measuring, sequencing, and recording." One of the activities or "indicators" for the outcome is to "examine ways in which various cultures, including First Nations and Métis, represent daily and seasonal changes through oral traditions and artistic works." This activity can be completed through the use of the Medicine wheel or by inviting an Elder into the classroom (as just two examples). Teachers do not even have to think of a way to connect the outcome to Aboriginal culture, it is right there in the curriculum.

Also on the curriculum website is a section for resources based on the subject. Pulling up the science resources I immediately see the book "Bridging Cultures: Indigenous and Scientific Ways of Knowing Nature". The website is filled with many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal based resources. These resources can either be accessed online or a hard copy can be mailed directly to the teacher.

I am very grateful for the knowledge I have gained throughout my schooling and professional practice in terms of Aboriginal education. Over the past four years, my classrooms have been made up of nearly 50% Aboriginal students. If we do not act and begin indigenizing our curriculum, that would mean 50% of my Grade 1's are at risk of not graduating! It is my duty to ensure all of my students have the best, most meaningful educational experience I can give.

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