Introduction

The Tenets of Curriculum Design

Why Are Standards Important to Curriculum Design?

I began my first year of teaching with a handshake of congratulations and a couple of textbooks for the subjects I would teach. Then, I was on my own. Believe it or not, I was not trained to teach from the state's standards from which my students would be judged and assessed. I didn't even know there was a framework.

All summer long, I pored over the textbooks and created lesson plans that would have made Madeline Hunter proud. Following the tenets of her famous five-step lesson plan from beginning to end, I crafted lesson after lesson. Each stage of the lesson plan process, from anticipatory set to culminating project, was culled from various sources—journal articles from dynamic, faceless teachers throughout the county, colorful textbook sidebars, and my own creations.

After my first year, I moved to another school. The principal, Bob Welch—my mentor and my sage—introduced me to standards and a framework. My first-year job failed to provide me with these crucial elements of the teaching profession. Or maybe I was so overwhelmed by the prospect of developing young minds that I overlooked this essential portion of my training. During this first year of teaching, I remember asking myself time and again what the kids were supposed to know after a year spent with me. What parts of the massive textbook were the imperative sections? What should be my guiding lights while perusing the textbooks and other materials? I felt lost as I arduously worked to assimilate information I was to impart without set boundaries and direction. Although I enjoyed the autonomy to teach certain units, something seemed clearly missing.

When I became more familiar with standards, my teaching became stronger. I felt more accountable to my students because I was teaching with the objectives I knew were intrinsically important, as before, but now I had seen the published content standards that served to reinforce

what I felt were important objectives. Following these clear sets of standards, ***I could still be as creative as I wanted in executing them.*** The autonomy was still there, despite what some might think. One advantage to being a new teacher was that I was not married to certain units of study. I was creating my classroom curriculum from the bottom up, and standards clearly pointed me in the right direction. They were the details to the job description I needed to find and write lessons. Receiving textbooks and the keys to Room 24 for teaching seventh-grade language arts and world history for the first five periods of the day was not enough information. Upon realizing there were standards to help guide me as well, I felt instant relief.

Did I think I could cover each standard effectively? Not necessarily. But my principal subscribed to the philosophy of "less is more," like our middle school California framework. When I knew the standards, crafting curriculum for the year became easier. I asked myself, "What are the standards that I could realistically and effectively teach in a given year?" I concentrated on key concepts and skills, knowing kids were subjected to district and state assessments, and used only those standards that made sense to me. Luckily, my principal supported me.

The Teacher Rubric (Scoring Guide) and Student Checklist Play a Crucial Role

Standards are surely not enough when writing curriculum for any classroom. In fact, many standards need to be studied and rewritten in more approachable language to be acceptable to many teachers and students. As I mentioned before, they are the guiding light, the overarching direction, the complete job description, but they can't stand alone. As an example, consider a mouthwatering picture of a lemon meringue pie with a detailed caption describing the ingredients necessary to create this luscious dessert. Teaching follows the same system. Standards identification is the first step for teachers, just as focusing on the objective of making a satisfying lemon meringue pie is for pastry chefs. We also need to define criteria for assessment based on our perception of certain standards and then share the criteria with students in a language that works for them. Once we are clear on the criteria, we have a targeted search for finding or creating lessons. Writing lessons is akin to accumulating the pie ingredients.

Understanding standards well enough to develop a set of criteria for lesson design and assessment is imperative. Teachers often dismiss the standards because they seem developmentally inappropriate, the language can be intimidating, or the standards appear too cumbersome to achieve. But when we rephrase these standards into our own language, we can create a teacher rubric for precisely what we want to assess. This teacher rubric is the scoring guide used to assess student achievement.

Our goal is to rewrite standards in clear, palatable language so we can communicate them to students in a way that rings true for them. After creating a teacher rubric and student checklist that restate the standards, we can then craft lessons.

The restaurant analogy that follows explains the aforementioned points in another way that sheds additional light on the curriculum design process I propose in this book.

TWO SCENARIOS: CURRICULUM DESIGN PROCESS ANALOGY

In a swank restaurant, a chef asked a protégé to create a pastry product. The student spent endless hours deciding which type of pastry to prepare, bought the ingredients, created and executed a pastry recipe, and proudly delivered what she thought her chef wanted. In turn, the chef smiled, studied the flavorful creation, tasted it, and bequeathed the student a mediocre grade. The student was crushed at the assessment, believing wholeheartedly that she deserved a better grade. The chef was frustrated, thinking his student surely was not the star pupil he had believed her to be initially. What went awry? What was amiss between chef and protégé?

Let us peer into another restaurant training program in which the same assessment was conducted. On Day 1 of a 6-week pastry class, the teacher initiated a dialogue with his students. He solicited information on what they knew about the tenets of fine pastry products. He conducted a tasting of various types of pastries to engage students and constantly focused the discussion on what constitutes an exemplary dessert. Finally, he shared with his pupils a checklist that specifically delineated his expectations for their final assessment at the end of the course of study. The expectations were taken from the restaurant's adopted standards, which were an adaptation of national pastry standards. Students knew on that first day of the 6-week course that they would be assessed on these expectations. In turn, the teacher pledged to base his instruction on each of the items on the checklist so students could be successful in the class and as future pastry chefs at this restaurant.

How do these two scenarios differ? In the first situation, the teacher allowed the unit of study to commence without clearly defined and communicated objectives that were an expression of standards. For the culminating project, he failed to share how he was assessing the project and also did not teach using these assessment points along the way.

In the second scenario, the teacher did his homework to identify what the standards for the unit would be. He then carefully crafted a defined list of expectations that he shared with his students. This set of criteria guided his teaching, and the students were well informed of how they would be assessed point by point.

Curriculum Design Elements

Because few, if any, of us are teaching Pastry 101, I will adapt this restaurant analogy to the classroom. In this book, you will learn a curriculum design process I use for writing curriculum for various teachers in all subject areas and all grades. It includes a four-part process:

1. Identify **grade-level content standards** for writing: *What do I want my students to know and be able to do?*
2. Create a **teacher rubric** with a clear set of criteria for writing assessment: *What are the key criteria for achieving these standards and assessing students?*
3. Craft a **student checklist** to guide students through the unit and self-assess: *What do students need to know and learn as they progress through the unit, and how will they be assessed?*
4. Design **lessons** to achieve standards: *How do I guide and assist students to achieve the criteria?*

Using the Pastry 101 example, the second chef followed the curriculum design elements perfectly.

- Prior to teaching his class, he researched the national **standards** and his restaurant standards in particular, so he was clear about what mattered in the class. He wanted to identify the key standards so the concepts and skills to be imparted to his students would be clearly defined.
- To prepare for teaching, he created a **teacher rubric** that would enable him to clearly select the criteria for assessment and teaching. This served as a way to set objectives and functioned as his guide in framing and executing individual lessons.
- He developed a student **checklist** so concepts and skills included in the criteria would be communicated to students repeatedly throughout the course and in language that was student-friendly. For the culminating assessment, students were prepared for what the teacher's expectations would be, and the teacher could assess against this clearly defined and articulated set of criteria.
- Last, he crafted **lessons** and exercises with the standards, assessment, and criteria clearly intact. And for what purpose? So that by the end of the course of study, students would be able to learn and be successful.

One More Connection to Drive Home the Point

In speaking with my father, it became apparent that private industry and public education are not as different as some might think. In fact, we might

learn something from the business world. My dad owned and operated a chain of about 35 dry-cleaning and service uniform stores in Indiana and currently consults with dry cleaners domestically and internationally to improve their businesses. He explained to me that in business parlance, executives who are consistently successful have one element in common: They have developed a series of systems that they practice over and over again. These systems or practices make everything they do effective. What do these effective people do? They always start with an objective—a specific goal they want to accomplish. Then they develop an action plan or system that will accomplish the goals they set forth. For example, if my father wanted to advertise to customers that their clothes cleaned at Tuchman Cleaners would be "ready to wear and ready on time," he developed a series of steps for his employees to use consistently to make this promise possible.

My father knows that I am a former classroom teacher who now empowers teachers to move ahead professionally. He is aware that in my role as an educational consultant, I make it my mission to assist my teacher-clients to challenge themselves and move ahead professionally. Similarly, I know that my father is a business consultant who empowers his clients to become more effective business people. But it was not until I showed him a draft of this Introduction that the parallel between our two worlds became clearer to us both. My curriculum design process is intended to help you do what successful business people do constantly: identify specific goals or objectives and then create an action plan that includes a measure of success.

All of this takes practice. It takes work. Once you learn this curriculum design process and employ it repeatedly, you will achieve better results from your students. Here are some comments that various teachers have made: "I feel I am more prepared to teach writing lessons in my classroom through Kathy's instruction. The lessons and checklists have produced better writing from my students because my students were clear about what was expected of them" (Denise Falzon, Corte Madera School). "Kathy's instruction and guidance inspire me to write. This, in turn, strengthens my teaching. I have learned so much from her" (Nancy Rhodes, Corte Madera School). "I appreciate the wealth of practical knowledge Kathy shared with us. This process of designing units and lessons is very powerful and has helped me be a better teacher. I feel I can articulate what it is I want my students to do when I have them write" (Kelly Corcoran, Woodside School). These and other teachers I have worked with have encouraged me to write this book to address the following issues:

- How do we translate standards language into something that is comfortable in order to write lessons?
- How do we as teachers craft lessons to satisfy those standards?
- How do we craft assessments that are meaningful and reveal student strengths and weaknesses?
- How do we measure student success in achieving our objectives and standards?

If answering these crucial questions and others is of interest to you, keep reading.