Applying Backward Design in Classroom Teaching

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From the *Glossary of Education Reform* (2013):

- a process that educators use to design learning experiences and instructional techniques to achieve specific learning goals
- begins with the objectives of a unit or course—what students are expected to learn and be able to do—and then proceeds “backward” to create lessons that achieve those desired goals
- helps teachers design a sequence of lessons, problems, projects, presentations, assignments, and assessments that result in students achieving the academic goals of a course

**What is backward design?**
According to Doug Buehl (2000), advantages of backward design include:

• Students are not as likely to become so lost in the factual detail of a unit that they miss the point of studying the original topic.
• Instruction looks toward global understandings and not just daily activities; daily lessons are constructed with a focus on what the overall "gain" from the unit is to be.
• Assessment is designed before lesson planning, so that instruction drives students toward exactly what they need to know.

Benefits of Backward Design
From McTighe, J., & Thomas, R.S. (2003):

- Identify the **results** desired (big ideas and skills)
  - What should the students know, understand, and be able to do?
  - Consider the goals and curriculum expectations
  - Focus on the "big ideas" (principles, theories, concepts, point of views, or themes)
- Determine acceptable levels of **evidence** that support that the desired results have occurred (culminating assessment tasks)
  - What will teachers accept as evidence that student understanding took place?
  - Consider culminating assessment tasks and a range of assessment methods (observations, tests, projects, etc.)
- Design **activities** that will make desired results happen (learning events)
  - What knowledge and skills will students need to achieve the desired results?
  - Consider teaching methods, sequence of lessons, and resource materials

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**The “Backward” in Backward Design**
The process of backward design

- Identify your stakeholders.
- Determine course objectives.
- Create assignments that support delivery of course objectives.
- Assess student learning.
• Who is invested in the outcomes of your course?
• Why?
• How are results shared with/reported to your stakeholders?

*Brainstorm Stakeholders in Small Group Discussion*

**Identifying your stakeholders**
Determining Course Objectives

• What MUST students learn in this course?
• What would you LIKE students to learn in this course?
• Does class time permit you to achieve both?
• How do the outcomes address the needs of your stakeholders?

Write 3-5 Course Objectives.
• Choose one course objective.
• Consider how to best communicate and test student knowledge on this objective.
• How many assignments will you need?
• In what format should they be presented?
• Are there alternate ways to communicate the same information?

Discuss Potential Assignments in Small Groups.

Creating Assignments
• Pretest and posttest student knowledge
• Collect student evaluations
• Evaluate student work against course objectives
• Invite feedback from stakeholders

*Discuss Opportunities and Challenges for Assessment in Small Groups.*

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**Assessing Learning**
• What is a reasonable number of outcomes for a one session class?
• What kind of assignment(s) can be completed in one session?
• What kind of assessment is possible in a one session class?
• What is a reasonable number of outcomes for a half/full semester class? What is different in this duration of course from a single session course?
• What kind of assignments are possible in a semester-long course?
• How do assessment types and opportunities differ in a semester-long course?

Example Course – Half to Full Semester
• What is a reasonable number of outcomes for a three session course? What makes this type of course unique?
• What kind of assignments are possible in a three session course?
• How do assessment types and opportunities differ in a three session course?

Example Course – 3 Session
Questions & Observations


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