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Preparing to Teach Content

“Not Just a Series of Fun Activities”

Vicki Kubler LaBoskey

Four preservice teachers were discussing lessons they had recently observed their cooperating teachers teach. Their task was both to briefly describe the lessons to their peers and explain the reasons given for the subject matter content.

Beth: My cooperating teacher taught a lesson about frogs to her second graders. They had just finished studying butterflies, and she was now teaching frogs in a comparative way. She said she was doing so because one of the State of California life sciences standards for second grade says that they need to know that the sequential stages of life cycles are different for different animals.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: All the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

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- Hector: I am in a kindergarten classroom. Vivian, my cooperating teacher, is doing a unit on pumpkins, since Halloween is coming up. The lesson had to do with estimating the circumference. The children had to estimate how big around in inches their class pumpkin was, and then they measured it with a tape measure and compared the actual measurement with their estimates. She says she does it every year at this time; she likes to construct her units around themes related to kids' interests.
- Crystal: My cooperating teachers—I have two of them who share a contract—taught a lesson to their eighth graders on bridge building with straws. The students worked in groups, and the aim was to try to build a bridge that would hold the most books. The teachers had gotten the idea from a workshop they attended and thought the kids would really enjoy it.
- Francesca: My cooperating teacher taught a mini-lesson to our third-grade class on subject-verb agreement. She said she did so because she had noticed that many of them were making several mistakes with regard to that in their writing.

Even in these brief commentaries, we can see that there are a myriad of factors to be considered in lesson and unit planning. Furthermore, there are a number of different ways to proceed in making these decisions, the possible results of which are virtually limitless. How should you go about deciding what to teach? For the lesson? For the unit? For the year? What is it, if anything, that all first graders should know about writing, about mathematics? All 12th graders? Who should determine what knowledge matters? For which students? What does it mean to *know* physics? History? How do you tell whether or not a student understands the meaning of democracy? Or knows multiplication? Should you teach reading any differently than you teach art? To this student or to that student? In this context or that context?

These are some of the questions regarding subject matter that you should be asking yourselves on a regular basis when you prepare to teach content—a daunting list of complex queries that have been debated by subject matter specialists and other educators for centuries. Are some answers to these questions better than others? Are some

approaches more viable? How can you decide? Where should you begin? Why does it matter?

❖ A PRINCIPLED APPROACH

It matters because the fundamental purpose of your work is to educate. Martin Haberman (2000) makes a distinction between *schools*, on the one hand, and *day camps* or *custodial centers* on the other. He argues that the former are places where teachers engage students in sustained and productive learning efforts. He critiques urban schools in particular for being more the latter than they should be, which is disastrous for the children who attend them:

Serious learning requires sustained activity over days, weeks, and months. And much of that activity is unpleasant *work*. In the “schools” that youngsters in poverty attend, staff members are fixated on management and getting through each day. By themselves, there is nothing wrong with activities such as making a turkey from a paper bag or visiting a museum or viewing a video on Eskimos. But whether the activities have learning potential or are merely jejune time fillers is determined by the teacher’s ability to generate sustained effort. The bits and pieces of disconnected things without any cumulative meaning that are typically offered to these youngsters do not meet the standard for learning in any recognized field of knowledge. (p. 207)

As a result, Haberman (2000) concludes, the students in urban schools end up not really knowing much of anything. But Howard Gardner (1991), in his book *The Unschooled Mind*, contends that the results are not more encouraging for any students anywhere.

In my work with elementary preservice teachers, I have characterized this all-too-frequent curricular problem as “just a series of fun activities.” It occurs when individual lessons, although action packed and even content rich, remain just that: individual lessons. Not being guided by any overall subject matter goals and having no connections made between them, these experiences are of limited educational value; they do not help children become powerful knowers, either within or across disciplines. My colleagues at the secondary level often comment that the problem is not confined to elementary teaching.

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Lessons for adolescents can be just as disconnected although not necessarily so enjoyable; thus, the comparable problem in high schools might be referred to as “just a series of not-so-fun activities.”

Two of the lessons described at the outset might be in particular danger of falling into this trap. Although we would, of course, have to know much more about what was happening in each context over time to be able to tell for sure, certain factors should flag our attention. Most questionable is the kindergarten lesson on pumpkins, for two reasons. The first has to do with the nature of the curricular context in which this mathematics lesson is situated. Now, many teachers construct all or parts of their curriculum around themes, and there are many good reasons for doing so. The literature on educating English Language Learners (ELLs) (e.g., Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), as well as that derived from brain research (e.g., Kovalik, 1997), suggests that theme-based instruction can provide especially meaningful learning opportunities to students. However, the chances for constructing units that are “just a series of fun activities” can be heightened by this approach, calling for extra care in ensuring knowledge is developing over time, both within as well as across disciplines. A second problem to be attended to here is that the particular concept objectives—circumference and standard measurement—are probably not developmentally appropriate for this group of learners. If a teacher is attending more to the theme and the interest of an activity than to the subject matter, then the likelihood of youngsters engaging in exercises with no ultimate meaning for them is increased.

The other lesson that we would want to interrogate especially carefully with regard to this issue is the one on bridge building. Teachers get their ideas from many sources; for example, textbooks, workshops, the Internet, magazines, books, and colleagues. These can provide you with wonderful, significant lesson possibilities. In fact, this lesson has much potential for contributing to the students’ understanding of science, mathematics, or even social studies, but only if the teacher helps to make those concepts explicit and connects this lesson to others that deal with relevant aspects of the subject matter(s). As Haberman (2000) pointed out, no matter how engaging or inherently valuable an activity, if it is not an integral part of a sustained learning effort, it is not educational.

A central aim of your teaching must be the development of powerful subject matter knowledge. Drawing on the work of Robert Moses (2001), Alan Schoenfeld (2002) argues that mathematical literacy is

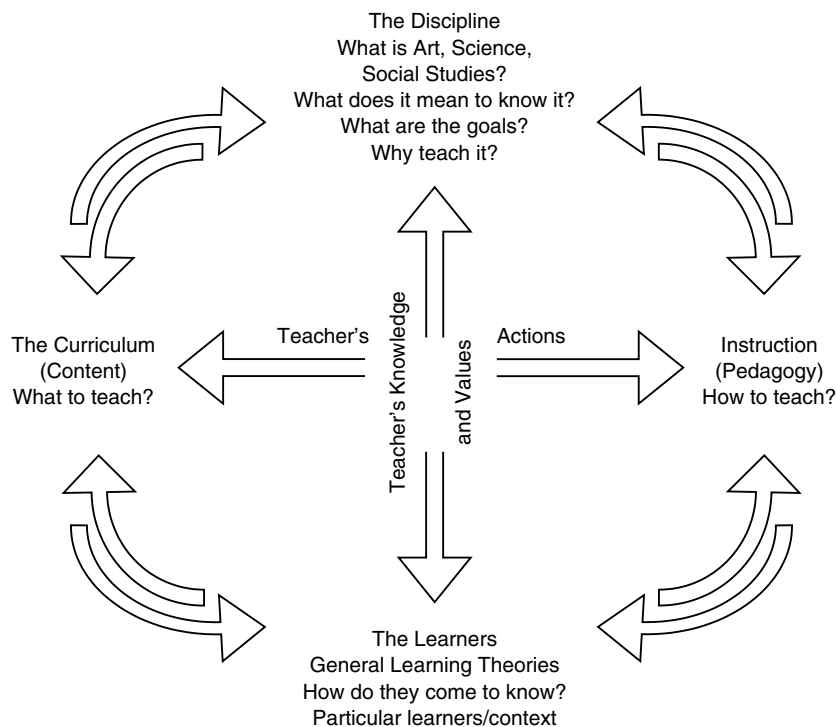
a civil-rights issue. What he means is that to gain access to higher education and well-paying jobs in this country, as well as to participate fully in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, students, most particularly the poor and students of color, need to know mathematics. Similar arguments could be made for the other disciplines. There are, therefore, moral, ethical, and political reasons for helping your students construct serious in-depth disciplinary knowledge. This is what we mean by taking a “principled” approach to teaching when starting with a subject matter focus: You design and implement your curriculum and instruction so that all of your students can *construct powerful subject matter knowledge* for *ethical* and *political* reasons using a *reflective, collegial* process guided by *moral* reasoning and an *ethic of care*. But what might this mean in practice? How can you actually do this? Where might you begin? The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the explication of a planning heuristic I have developed with the help of many cadres of credential candidates over the last several years. It is a tool for thinking and decision making that may or may not prove useful to you but should at least provide a concrete example of what principled planning might look like.

❖ A PRINCIPLED PLANNING HEURISTIC

These issues are complicated but can be particularly challenging for elementary teachers because they have to work with so many different disciplines, some of which may not be areas of substantive expertise. I will use elementary examples in this chapter, both because of that added complexity and because these are the people with whom I usually work. But the questions to be asked and answered are the same regardless of grade level and of whether or not you are teaching one or many subjects in California or Kansas. The proposed approach (see Figure 5.1) can work equally well for any teacher anywhere.

❖ THE DESCRIPTION

The heuristic is not a recipe; it is not formulaic. What it does do is make explicit the general factors to be considered in the planning process, as well as highlight some of the most pressing questions to be addressed. In addition, it illustrates the active and interactive nature of the

Figure 5.1 Heuristic for a Principled Planning Process

endeavor and its many potential starting points. First, I will explain the different aspects of the framework and then illustrate two of the several different ways you could use it to take a principled approach to curricular development and implementation.

The vertical axis has to do with what you as the teacher know and value—your theories of teaching and learning, if you will. The horizontal axis represents your planned curriculum and instruction, or what you actually choose to do in your practice. The circular presentation of these factors and the bidirectional arrows represent how all aspects interrelate with and impact one another. Furthermore, the figure is meant to suggest that this is a recursive, responsive process with no real beginning or end.

The top of the vertical axis, which could just as well be at the bottom, has to do with your knowledge and values regarding the subject

matter you are teaching. It includes your definitions of the discipline, with what you consider to be, in Schwab's (1964) terms, both its substantive knowledge (what constitutes the content knowledge of the discipline) and its syntactic knowledge (how knowledge is generated and tested in the field). It involves conceptualizations of what it means to know and engage in the subject matter at different stages of development and of why that knowledge is important.

Fortunately, in constructing your perspectives on these matters you do not have to start from scratch; many resources are available for consultation. Of course, your state frameworks or standards will provide guidance in this regard; in fact, most states will require attention to, even compliance with, their formulations. The national subject matter organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Science Foundation, and the National Council for the Social Studies, to name a few, also have documents conceptualizing their disciplines and iterating appropriate standards. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, structured according to subject matter and school level specialization, can also provide an important perspective on these issues. The cataloging could go on, which in itself can be part of the problem. The differences between and among these various positions can sometimes be extreme; Suzanne Wilson (2003) has referred to this phenomenon as the "curriculum wars." How are you to choose which one or ones to follow? As the lists of standards proliferate, how are you to cover them all? Even if you do, there are no guarantees that powerful subject matter knowledge will be the result; the whole, as they say, is greater than the sum of its parts. So although the frog lesson may hold more promise for providing a worthwhile learning opportunity for the students because it is based on a state standard, you are still responsible for both evaluating the merits of that standard in the first place and, if you embrace it, helping your students make the necessary connections, something this teacher seems to be trying to do by making comparisons with previous work on butterflies. Many additional questions have to be asked and answered, and there is much that you need to know and consider.

Bottom line, to make these judgments you must have adequate knowledge of the discipline yourself. What is adequate? This is also a hotly debated topic in various educational arenas and one that we will not be able to answer here. Useful to our purposes, however, is work like that done in mathematics by Ball and Bass (2000), who suggest that what you need is "pedagogically useful" content knowledge. By that

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they mean, "Teachers need mathematical knowledge in ways that equip them to navigate . . . complex mathematical transactions flexibly and sensitively with diverse students in real lessons" (p. 94). You need to be able to "use subject matter knowledge to figure out what [your] students know, to pose questions, to evaluate and modify [your] textbooks wisely, to design instructional tasks, to manage class discussions, to explain curriculum to parents" (p. 99). It means not only that you need to be able to do the mathematics yourself but that you have the wherewithal to "hear students flexibly, represent ideas in multiple ways, connect content to contexts effectively, and think about things in ways other than [your] own" (p. 94). Again, Ball and Bass are speaking about mathematical knowledge in this case, but similar arguments are being made for other disciplines such as history (Wilson, 2001) and science (Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, & Scott, 1994).

Because knowing for teaching is different than discipline-based knowledge, substantial background, even expertise, in a subject matter will not guarantee that you know the content in ways that will enable you to teach it well to your students. Furthermore, scholars like Kevin Kumashiro (2001), interested in anti-oppressive education, suggest that the knowledge you have gained about social studies, English, mathematics, and science is very likely a "partial" story, representing the singular viewpoint of the dominant social group. You will thus need to "look beyond" what you already know and are being asked to teach in ways that can ensure more inclusive understandings. You need to be—and help your students learn to be—critics of the disciplines. Embracing this aim of change, Kumashiro states, will require you to become comfortable with uncertainty in your educational interactions with your students. You will have to accept that neither the outcomes nor the means for getting there can be fully specified ahead of time. It means your "lesson plans need space for the unpredictable and uncontrollable things that always get in the way of knowing [your] students and achieving [your] objectives" (p. 10). You will need to reflect on your lessons by asking not only, "What 'worked'?" but also, "What did this lesson make possible and impossible? In what ways did it enable repetition, crisis, change, and so forth?" (p. 10).

In essence, Kumashiro (2001) is suggesting that you can only know what and how you need to teach the disciplines in the context of actually attempting to do so, which is not unlike a position taken by Ball and Bass (2000). In our heuristic, this is represented by the center, where all of the various aspects come together in practice and reflection

on that practice—where your knowledge and values with regard to the disciplines and the ways in which particular learners might come to know them are put into action. It is also where your actions can begin to feed back out to your knowledge base and your planning processes, but only if you reflect on them in thorough and thoughtful ways. One promising vehicle for facilitating such reflection, according to Ball and Bass among others, is the student work that results from these activities and interchanges, which directs our attention to the bottom of the vertical axis in the heuristic. This has to do with your theories of learning, as well as your knowledge of the particular learners you are teaching and the context in which you are teaching them.

One of the other chapters in this book, Chapter 4, should be particularly helpful to you with regard to this aspect. Again, you do not have to start from scratch; there are many available resources. As always, however, the ultimate responsibility is yours: You must decide what learning theories will guide your curricular decision making now and in the future. In addition, you need to continuously redecide based on new evidence and understandings, which by implication means you need to stay informed about them. What is critical is that those theories are well constructed, empirically justified, and socially responsible; they must be systematically formulated with an aim of ensuring that *all* learners will be able to develop powerful subject matter knowledge.

A virtually universal perspective in the field at present is that you must attend to your particular students when making decisions about the teaching of content, a rationale supported by both learning theory and political ideals. As stated by Lewis and Johnson (2002), “Classrooms characterized by post-modernity are open, the teacher and students share power, students are actively engaged in constructing their own knowledge, and learning is conceived of as a dialogical and social process” (p. 57). This means that students should have a voice in curricular decision making; their interests, values, and expressed needs will influence your teaching. In addition, it implies that you will have to take into account the multiple aspects of your student population and context; for example, race, gender, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, disabilities, available resources, community values, and support systems. This will require, of course, that you make the effort to get to know and understand these things.

Accommodating to the needs of your learners also means that you must engage in ongoing efforts to determine what your students

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already know and are able to do; you will have to analyze and evaluate their work with regularity to determine what it is you should teach next. The third-grade teacher who taught a lesson on subject-verb agreement because she had discovered that her students were having trouble with this skill was doing just that. But she was probably attentive to that competency in part because it is a State of California designated standard for the third-grade language arts curriculum. If so, this choice would be representative of the coming together of the two ends of the vertical axis, which asks you to consider such questions as: How does a student come to know this discipline? How might I teach this content to this group of learners? What is it that this particular student knows and does not know about this topic? Those who write about culturally relevant teaching (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994) can be helpful in this regard. According to Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003),

Cultural modeling calls on researchers and practitioners to examine the students' everyday practices, in their families and peer social networks, directing their attention toward processes of reasoning and habits of mind as well as toward naïve theories and misconceptions that may bear some relationship to a targeted set of specific concepts and strategies in a subject-matter discipline. (p. 8)

Lee et al. are explicitly addressing the need to draw on the strengths of particular students in helping them to learn specific subject matter knowledge. You can begin at either point, but both ends of the vertical axis and the interaction between them will need to be considered in deciding what to teach—the content of your lessons—and how to teach it—the pedagogical strategies you use. This is the horizontal axis: your planned curriculum and instruction. What actually happens, the implemented curriculum, is, as mentioned above, at the center.

The way in which I have described this heuristic tends to imply that you always begin with the vertical axis, either endpoint or both together, when you engage in principled planning. This is not necessarily the case. You can also begin with the horizontal axis. In actuality, you should always begin and end with the center, with reflections on your actual practice and its outcomes. But with that input to guide you, you might next identify new learning goals derived from student needs and interests in relationship to justifiable content standards and then select or design appropriate interventions. But you could also

proceed to seek out possible curricular and pedagogical options, which you then select and modify according to your theories of teaching and learning. In the next section, we offer hypothetical and abbreviated examples of starting with the vertical axis and starting with the horizontal axis to engage in the principled planning of an elementary social studies lesson.

❖ PLANNING EXAMPLES

Vertical Axis Initiation

Catherine is a fifth-grade teacher who is in a reading group with other teachers of various grade levels at different schools; all of the teachers graduated from the same credential program and have remained friends. The latest readings they have been discussing are from a book called *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* (Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 1998). The James Banks (1998) chapter, wherein he describes four levels of multicultural curriculum reform, particularly impressed Catherine. She has always valued multicultural education and believes it to be a critical aspect of her social studies program. She feels that one of the central purposes of social studies education is to prepare students for the rights and responsibilities of world citizenship. To her, this includes understanding and appreciating different groups of people in the United States and around the world and their historical and current interdependence. What she realized, however, when applying Banks's framework to an analysis of her program, was that most of her lessons had been at the lower levels of his continuum: the Contributions Approach and the Ethnic Additive Approach. She decided that to better meet her newly articulated social studies goals, she had to design her lessons to be consistent with the higher levels: the Transformative Approach and the Decision-Making and Social Action Approach.

In this process, Catherine is working at the top of the vertical axis of our heuristic. With the help of both present (her teacher friends) and text-based (Banks) colleagues, she is reformulating and adding detail to her understanding of social studies. She has encountered a new perspective on the meaning and purpose of social studies education that is consistent with, but more focused and developed than her current view. Therefore, the new ideas are fairly easily incorporated into her

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existing conceptual framework. She understands, however, that before she can proceed to make the hoped-for changes in her curriculum and instruction, she will have to strengthen her knowledge of the subject matter. She teaches fifth grade in California, and the state framework specifies that the focus of her social studies program needs to be on American history, as is true of many other states. In order for her to design and implement units that are more consistent with the upper levels of Banks's (1998) continuum, she has to enhance her knowledge of that history from multiple perspectives. So she turns next to reading books such as Howard Zinn's (1997) *A People's History of the United States*, an endeavor that will continue for some time to come.

In the meantime, Catherine feels that she can begin to reconstruct her curriculum with these new aims and structures in mind. The next unit in her program is to be on the causes of the American Revolution, Standard 5.5 of the *History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools* (California Department of Education, 2001). The details of that standard include the following:

1. Understand how political, religious, and economic ideas and interests brought about the Revolution (e.g., resistance to imperial policy, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, taxes on tea, Coercive Acts)
2. Know the significance of the first and second Continental Congresses and of the Committees of Correspondence
3. Understand the people and events associated with the drafting and signing of the Declaration of Independence and the document's significance, including the key political concepts it embodies, the origins of those concepts, and its role in severing ties with Great Britain
4. Describe the views, lives, and impact of key individuals during this period (e.g., King George III, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams) (pp. 2-3)

Catherine believes that these standards could still help to guide her new approach to the curriculum, but they would not be complete as stated. She has to embellish them by incorporating into Number 1, for instance, an understanding of the views of the British and the French.

For Numbers 2 through 4, she must include knowledge goals about the wives, families, and slaves who made it possible for these men to leave home for long periods of time and engage in this work. She will be sure her students come to understand the role that living among Native Americans played in the development of the colonists' views about society and government. She also wants her students to become familiar with the perspectives of those who were opposed to the Revolution. She consults resources that can help her to fill these gaps, including original newspaper accounts, diaries, and autobiographies and British and French textbooks on the war.

Before formulating her plans, Catherine needs to find out what her students already know or think they know about the causes of the Revolutionary War, as well as what they would like to know. In addition, she needs to understand how they are thinking about American history in general, both what it is and how it has been recorded and reported and why. She wants the children both to learn some history and to begin to think like historians. In focusing in this way on her students, Catherine is drawing on her knowledge of the bottom part of the vertical axis and its relationship to the top. She is inquiring into what her particular students might need and want to know about her identified subject matter goals. She is also drawing on her knowledge of learning theory to help her determine the best ways for them to come to know it. She believes for instance that learning will be enhanced if they can pursue their own questions, if they are actively engaged in investigation and problem solving, if they consult and critique a wide variety of primary documents, if they can both acquire and share information using their multiple intelligences, and if they interact and deliberate with one another and with her.

Catherine now draws on this information in attending to the horizontal axis of the heuristic: the planning of her curriculum and instruction. One sample lesson from her unit can illustrate what might result from this process. Toward the end of the unit, she includes a lesson in which the students work in groups to identify what strategies different constituencies employed to try to get their views known and thereby to influence the decision as to whether or not the colonies would engage in a war for independence. After brainstorming approaches taken, the students will analyze them according to which strategies were most and least successful and then engage in a discussion as to why that might be, which would include attention to who was employing the strategies and why. The lesson concludes with students making entries

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in their social studies journals, summarizing in words and drawings what they learned about efforts to influence public opinion during that period in American history. In a subsequent lesson, they will draw on those inferences to make decisions about how they might go about influencing a present-day political issue in their own communities, which they will eventually try to enact. One of the many reasons Catherine has for constructing this lesson is that it seems to embody her newly embraced goal of creating a multicultural curriculum that is consistent with Banks's (1998) fourth level, the Decision-Making and Social Action Approach.

As Catherine begins to implement the unit, she engages in constant monitoring of actual interactions and of the student work that results. She looks for developing understandings and areas of confusion and adjusts accordingly. She focuses her assessments on looking for evidence of what Banks (1998) describes as an understanding of "how the common U.S. culture and society emerged from a complex synthesis and interaction of the diverse cultural elements that originated within the various cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups that make up American society" (p. 75). She does not test for facts because that is not her goal; she looks to see whether or not students are learning to think like historians and are developing an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, as evidenced in their written work, including their social studies journal, visual constructions, and oral presentations. If the students pose questions that she cannot answer, she tries to both enhance her own knowledge and direct them to resources that will help them find out for themselves. She reflects on her teaching by continuously asking herself questions like the following:

- What evidence do I have that the students are aware of and open to multiple perspectives on the events and issues leading to the Revolutionary War?
- What kinds of worthwhile historical questions are they asking and pursuing?
- Which students are not as engaged or making as much progress as the others, why might that be so, and what might I do about it?
- How are my pedagogies providing equal access to information for my three ELLs? How often do they share their views, and, when they do, are they analyzing and synthesizing information or just reciting facts?

Catherine explores these and other questions with feedback from her students and the support of her teacher colleagues. Her new unit (the horizontal axis), planned in accordance with her transformed theories about the nature and purpose of social studies education for her particular learners (the vertical axis), is a work in progress, a process not a product, a beginning not an end.

Horizontal Axis Initiation

Tyrone is a fourth-grade teacher in New York City. His school district has just adopted a new social studies curriculum, *Social Studies Alive!* (Bower & Lobdell, 2003). Tyrone is unsure about whether or not this new program will be consistent with his current views about social studies education for fourth graders in his context. He needs to determine to what extent and in what ways he might go about implementing this new program. First, he engages in a careful review of the fourth-grade curricular materials, beginning with the authors' stated intentions and rationales. In the introduction, Bower and Lobdell (2003) assert that their approach "consists of a series of instructional practices that allow students of all abilities to 'experience' history. These teaching methods were developed by teachers who carefully and thoughtfully combined . . . three educational theories" (p. vii). The three theories listed are Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, Elizabeth Cohen's theory of cooperative groupwork, and Jerome Bruner's idea of the spiral curriculum. The authors then proceed to explain how and why the student text is designed to enable and improve student reading comprehension. In this discussion, they emphasize the important role "anticipation" plays in the successful understanding of expository text. To support student development of this skill, they encourage the use of the KWL strategy, which includes the three-step process of having students recall what they *know*, determine what they *want* to know, and keep track of what they *learn* as they proceed.

Tyrone is encouraged by this information. He is not only familiar with but also in agreement with the three learning theories by which they claim to be guided. He will, of course, have to see for himself whether or not the curriculum is really consistent with these views when he examines and uses the actual lessons. Furthermore, KWL is a strategy already common in his pedagogy because it gives him important information about his students that can inform his teaching and

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gives them a voice in the determination of their own learning. He is also pleased that the authors have made an effort to make the text both accessible and instructive for the less-skilled readers in his class, again something he will have to test out for himself. The curriculum seems to be well grounded in learning theory, the bottom part of the vertical axis. Tyrone notices, however, that very little is said in the introduction about the authors' views on the discipline of social studies. He can find no explicit statement about their definition of social studies education or their overall aims for the program. Their position about the top portion of the vertical axis seems to be more implicit and will have to be inferred from the content and pedagogy of the individual and cumulative lessons.

Tyrone's next step, therefore, is to examine the texts and supporting materials. He first looks at the overall program and then scrutinizes a few sample lessons. This review is guided by his theories and values with regard to the teaching of social studies and his knowledge of the discipline, which he has found to be well represented by the position of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (1994). He also will check to see how well the curriculum addresses New York's relevant learning standards (New York State Education Department, 2003), which he considers to be generally appropriate.

What Tyrone finds is that the first lesson is framed by the question, What are the social sciences? The stated purpose is to help "students discover that the social sciences offer powerful ways to understand individuals and society" (Bower & Lobdell, 2003, p. iv). The social sciences included are economics, geography, political science, and history. The instructions to the teacher contain a suggestion:

Explain to students that they will learn to become social scientists throughout the year and that this is the first lesson in their training as "junior social scientists." As the year progresses, they will put on different social scientist "hats" to develop different ways of thinking about human behavior. (p. 3)

This indicates to Tyrone that a clear goal of the program is to help the students learn to acquire the skills of social science and not just learn a series of disparate facts. This is consistent with NCSS's (1994) position, which not only emphasizes social studies as an integrated discipline but also aims to develop skills as well as knowledge. Likewise, it seems to be compatible with New York's learning standards for social studies,

which use the same four disciplines to conceptualize the field. The authors also have a strong emphasis on the development of intellectual skills as opposed to itemized facts. A look at the whole table of contents in the teacher's guide suggests that the children will continue to learn about individuals and society through these different lenses over the course of the year, as well as consider how these various disciplinary perspectives might interrelate in efforts to understand and resolve human problems.

Also of critical importance to Tyrone is that there be equal representation of the voices and influences of the many racial and ethnic groups who have populated this land. Three of the four key ideas in New York's Standard 1 (New York State Education Department, 2003), which relates to the history of the United States and New York, emphasize this aspect:

- *Key Idea 1:* The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions.
- *Key Idea 2:* Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives.
- *Key Idea 3:* Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

Tyrone detects many lessons (and lessons are multiday events in this program) that are either explicitly focused on the diversity issue—for example, Lesson 3 investigates The Peopling of the United States by multiple racial and ethnic groups—or inclusive of it—for example, an activity in Lesson 11 explores the question of Colorado River water use from the perspective of Native Americans, farmers, ranchers, Mexicans, and city dwellers.

Tyrone is getting the sense that this curriculum is in the main consistent with his theories of the teaching and learning of social studies. He does have two concerns about aspects that seem to be missing from the program. The first has to do with overall vision. NCSS (1994) stresses that the aim of social studies education is the promotion of

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civic competence: "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (p. 1). This curriculum does not seem to give explicit emphasis to this purpose. Bower and Lobdell (2003) talk about the importance of understanding human behavior but, at least in Tyrone's initial perusal of the program, not much about the ultimate aim of that understanding. This is something he will want to be sure to incorporate.

Tyrone's second concern also has to do with a missing piece. His fourth-grade social studies program has been focused on the State of New York. Bower and Lobdell (2003) take a regional rather than a state-focused approach. Tyrone assumes that this is because it is material designed for a national market. The last few chapters do provide a general structure for the students to investigate the geography, history, economy, and government of their state, which will be helpful in this regard, but he feels he will have to supplement this with some lessons from his previous curriculum. Because both of his concerns seem to entail supplementation rather than transformation, Tyrone feels positive about using this new curriculum. He recognizes, however, that he will need to give careful attention to each lesson as he proceeds and, if necessary, adapt it to fit his goals and the particular needs of his students.

To do so effectively, Tyrone, like Catherine, will have to engage in the ongoing monitoring of classroom interactions and student work. Because his whole school is implementing this new curriculum at the same time, Tyrone will arrange to work with the other fourth-grade teachers on this project. They will observe one another teach during their prep periods and solicit the help of parents to videotape lessons that the teachers can then watch and debrief together during grade-level meetings. With the help of his colleagues, Tyrone will reflect on his teaching of this content by repeatedly asking himself questions like the following:

- How is this individual lesson consistent with the learning theories of Gardner, Cohen, and Bruner?
- Is this lesson appropriate for my particular students, and, if not, what adaptations might I make? Are there any specific changes I need to create so that my two special-needs students can fully participate in and gain from this lesson?

- What connections am I making between lessons so that they will lead to enhanced social studies skills as well as greater knowledge of the history, government, economics, and geography of the State of New York in relationship to the rest of the country?
- How is the program helping my students “develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 1994, p. 1), and how can I tell?

In Tyrone’s case, the curriculum and instruction—the horizontal axis—has already been constructed by others; his job will be to adapt, adjust, supplement, and replace that program according to both his pre-existing theories of the teaching and learning of social studies and what he discovers from his ongoing reflection on what actually happens during and as a result of implementation. This process may alter his original theories and values, the vertical axis.

❖ THE PRINCIPLED PLANNING AND
IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IN
AN ERA OF REGULATION AND HIGH-STAKES TESTING

The cases of Tyrone and Catherine are hypothetical and brief. You are not meant to conceive of them as ideals or even models—certainly not as recipes to follow. They are instead intended to provide you with images of the possible with regard to the principled planning and implementation of lessons and units that will contribute to the development of powerful subject matter knowledge for all of your students. They present scenarios that illustrate some of the complexity of practice and the importance of context-sensitive decision making. The cases emphasize the notion that curricular planning and instruction needs to be an ongoing, collegial process of reflective deliberation about your teaching and your students’ learning, informed by well-justified, ever-developing conceptualizations of the disciplines, theories of teaching and learning, and moral, ethical, and political values and aims. The cases demonstrate that the heuristic can be used flexibly and responsively to help you both create and design your own curriculum and evaluate and adapt existing lessons and units appropriately. It is an approach that is consistent with the positive aspects of the current climate of standards-based reform and resistant to the more negative qualities.

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The nobler motivation behind standards-based reform is the desire to have all students develop substantive disciplinary knowledge, an equity agenda with which we certainly agree. The question is not whether we should have standards but which standards and decided by whom. In addition, as a recent study by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2001) would suggest, we need to problematize how those standards might be achieved and assessed. Strong advocates of what they refer to as coherent standards-based *systems*, the AFT decided to investigate how well the country was doing with regard to this effort. In their view, standards-based reform is an ordered process that includes “well-developed standards and a curriculum to support their implementation; professional development for teachers; new assessments aligned to the standards; and fair incentives and sufficient resources to help students make the grade” (p. 9). What the AFT found is that all states have set or are setting common academic standards for students and that the quality of those standards is improving, according to their criteria (p. 25). While encouraging in general, the findings lend credence to our suggestion that you cannot simply accept at face value the particular standards in your state. They can be one of many possible guides for your standard-setting endeavors.

Far more problematic are the other aspects of the reform system. The AFT (2001) discovered that curriculum construction with accompanying professional development had only just begun. Thus, programs and resources for the implementation of standards-based instruction, the necessary next step, had yet to be achieved. Nonetheless, many states were skipping right to the assessment of those nonexistent programs. This inherently flawed approach has resulted in the following:

- Many state assessment programs are based on weak standards.
- Many state assessment programs use tests unaligned to their standards.
- A number of states use results from nonaligned tests to hold back students or deny them a diploma.
- Many states impose sanctions on students but fail to mandate intervention and to provide the resources to help them. (p. 34)

Further exacerbating the problem, according to James Popham (2001), is the use of high-stakes standardized achievement tests that not only are *not* aligned with particular state standards but also are absolutely

incapable of doing what standards-based reform assessments need to do—"ascertain the caliber of students' schooling" (p. 74). The impact of this misguided approach to educational reform is most catastrophic for the very students it was originally intended to benefit. The previously underserved students are the ones most often sanctioned, held back, and denied diplomas (AFT, 2001; Popham, 2001) under the current systems. In addition, the overall effect has been "curricular reductionism," focused on low-level cognitive skills and a preponderance of "drill and kill" test preparation exercises (Popham, 2001) that again diminish the long-term opportunities for those same students. In fear of threatened retributions, schools are trading marginal short-term gains on inappropriate measures for the deep understanding of subject matter necessary for subsequent high-level work and educational progress.

But as Popham (2001) also argues, we cannot absolve ourselves of responsibility for these difficulties. We have not fully embraced our professional responsibilities with regard to curriculum and its assessment. As a result, others are trying to do so for us and in ill-informed and often harmful ways. We urge you, therefore, to act as professionals by taking a principled approach to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of subject matter instruction. You need to continue to build your understanding and expertise with regard to both the vertical axis of the heuristic—knowledge of the discipline, knowledge of learners and learning, and the relationship between the two—and the horizontal—awareness and understanding of multiple, viable teaching strategies and existing or potential curricula. You need to continuously reflect on your implemented curriculum and its outcomes with the help of your students, colleagues, and the educational literature, asking always about who is benefiting and to what ends. In some schools and districts that have overly prescribed and narrowly focused curricula or high-stakes and misaligned testing, due to a lack of faith in your professional expertise, this will be a greater, but all the more pressing challenge. Even in such circumstances, a principled approach should help you to incorporate seemingly small adjustments that can make a big difference in contributing to your efforts to enable all of your students to progress in developing in-depth subject matter knowledge that will have long-term as well as short-term benefits. Especially important is to help your students engage in sustained, well-justified learning experiences, where connections between and among activities, ideas, concepts, and skills are constructed. You have the professional and moral responsibility

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to ensure that your curriculum will not be “just a series of fun, or even not-so-fun activities” that lead your learners nowhere in particular.

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