

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Professional Scholarship Revisited

In the last decade we have been bombarded by mandates from federal and state agencies usually associated with standards, high stakes tests, and other regulatory directives. Not complying with such mandates and directives is broadcasted throughout the professional and public domains, usually in derogatory terms. The idea of noncompliance is so pervasive that curriculum coordinating councils and subject area committees spend inordinate amounts of time trying to deduce what expectations are, and then attempting to construct programs that *exactly* meet those directives.

Many academic programs in American schools today, especially at the elementary levels in reading, math, and perhaps science, are guided by that rationale. While there are those who suggest that such "truths" (in the guise of standards) are nothing of the kind, the prevailing system has magnified the term *standards-based* to the level of a religious mantra not to be disputed. That way of thinking can make a local curriculum look much like a clone of the standards themselves, no matter how fragmented or poorly worded those standards are.

CLI promotes the idea that intellectually and scholastically engaged local educators can do better than that. They use standards as guidelines but practice Benjamin Bloom's definition of "creating" to develop a local curriculum that speaks to the standards in a reasonable and constructivist way, without sacrificing local priorities and alternative perspectives.

The **Curriculum Research and Development Group** (CRDG) at the University of Hawaii, which oversees the university's laboratory school, does not allow standards alone to dictate the content of curriculum, but has rather created a curricular design strategy that is both novel and sensible. Note the emphasis on logical scope and sequence, as well as the use of foundational areas of concentration in the CRDG statements below.

An individual learns essential knowledge best when it is presented in a consistent, logical, developmental pattern over a long span of time. Short, modular bits of knowledge do not fit into patterns or reinforce each other, hence are quickly forgotten. The learning process for each person (including the skills, concepts, and processes that make up knowledge) must be consistent and developmental from lesson to lesson, from unit to unit, from semester to semester, from teacher to teacher, and through all the years of schooling. For example, instruction in composition includes daily practice over the years of schooling. Each lesson on writing integrates knowledge and skills taught earlier with new, advanced, and more complex features, so that review and integration of old with the new is continuous.

This strategy consists of two interrelated parts. Students must be working throughout their educational careers in a selected number of essential fields of knowledge: the sciences – both natural and social; the humanities – art, music, literature, and drama; and technology – the study of human processes and institutions. This study must be augmented with sports, activity in organizations, and other extracurricular activities to build a balanced top-quality program.

Varied instructional approaches. *There is a place for telling, lecturing, and assigning and monitoring class work and homework. But most instructional activity consists of inquiring, questioning, probing, hypothesizing, thinking critically, and engaging in other intellectual endeavors. Students of all age levels and ability are steadily immersed in interesting and challenging tasks, problems, and well-written, significant pieces of literature. It is best if students see more sophisticated practitioners, both teachers and more-advanced students, working at the task and exemplifying or modeling the integrated, humane aspects of all intellectual and practical work. A curriculum that continually integrates part to whole, earlier to later, simpler to more complex, and theoretical to applied is most likely to relate to differences in students' rates and styles of learning.*

Those who observe classrooms in this school will discern that the teachers have been carefully prepared to perform in ways shown in the above descriptors. There is no ability grouping anywhere in the school, even though the students have been drawn from a very diverse population in Honolulu and its suburbs. Interestingly, the processes described above are based on the work of John Dewey, who actually created what is now the charter lab school back in the 1920s when he was a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii. Almost everything about the school can be traced to Dewey's ideas expressed in his book, *Democracy and Education* (1916).

Today's emphasis on ensuring that everything is *standards-based* clearly has its limitations. That's especially true if you put following dictates of those who create and impose academic conditions against principles established by the giants who created American education. Dewey, Ralph Tyler, Benjamin Bloom and others – such as William Edwards Deming – advocated and celebrated creative forms of scholastically inductive thinking and acting in everyone. It is our responsibility to perpetuate that more intellectually dynamic and creative process today by developing programs that don't just meet standards, but far exceed them.