

Scope and Sequence in an Era of State and National Standards

Over the years the term “scope and sequence” has been used by textbook companies to support the teaching of basic knowledge areas and skills. In past years a school that used the same textbook series generally found that the text-based method for vertically connecting a grade-to-grade curriculum worked reasonably well. Today, in this era of specific state and national standards, the situation is more complex. That’s because:

1. many schools and districts minimize the use of textbooks and textbook series by using multiple resources,
2. scope and sequence in today’s educational climate is much more than a declaration of what should or must be “covered,”
3. there is more interest today in creating a seamless curriculum grades kindergarten through twelve, and
4. state and national standards are often not written with scope and sequence in mind.

Given the above considerations, probably the most important question for curriculum leaders might be this one:

In what way can we ensure that a published public school curriculum is appropriate to the needs of students in grades kindergarten through 12, sequenced so it continuously spirals through the grades as articulated and ever more sophisticated subject matter, and taught so its intended goals are clearly met in terms of quality student learning?

Answering that question is not easy but a few recent concepts seem to be making a difference. Here are three of them:

1. **THE WORDING OF INTENDED LEARNING EXPECTATIONS IS CRITICAL.** A published public school curriculum, whether coming from external standards or not, must be written clearly in terms of content and expectations of student learning. The wording of such intentions for student learning cannot be vague or misleading; the intentions must be written in ways that are easy to interpret. Because the standards movement is quite recent, there are many national and state standards that range from good to awful in the context of wording. Our job is to discern the difference, and act accordingly when it comes to writing a local curriculum.
2. **WORD INTERPRETATION MUST BE PRECISE IN TERMS OF HOW IT AFFECTS INSTRUCTION.** Teachers must become “wordsmiths” in the sense they can clearly discern what is meant by outcome statements (standards or local curricula). That means teachers cannot make *assumptions* about published outcome statements, but must thoroughly analyze words and phrases, and create accurate interpretations, which then direct instruction.
3. **LESSON PLANNING MUST BE FOCUSED ON DESIGN-DOWN TECHNIQUES THAT WORK.** Teachers should understand that reliance on daily lesson plans, while still important, is not the ultimate approach to preparing instructional material. A system for unit planning that is compatible with

the standards movement (such as CLI’s lesson plan resource) is equally important, because there must be some sort of direct linkage between published intentions for student learning and what happens in the classroom. Without that kind of linkage there is a tendency to make assumptions, and assumptions about student learning intentions are always imprecise and sometimes off the mark entirely.

Those three considerations in this new era for *scope and sequence* could be stated as **THOUGHTFUL WORD SELECTION AND APPLICATION, CAREFUL INTERPRETATION OF WORD MEANING, and PRECISE LESSON PLANNING BASED ON THOSE WORDS.** So, what is the local curriculum leader to do with regard to those considerations? In the remainder of this *E-Hint* we will explore the most important of the three considerations, which is the first one: *Thoughtful Word Selection and Application.*

We’ve all heard it suggested that when it comes to words and the importance of scope and sequence, that Bloom’s Taxonomy is perfect. Under that belief, any skill or knowledge area can be spiraled through the grades by beginning with the category of KNOWLEDGE, moving upward to the category of COMPREHENSION, and then up through the other categories until we finally reach EVALUATION. While that seems an easy way to deal with the issue, Benjamin Bloom would have considered such thinking to be nonsense. He never thought of the taxonomy as hierarchical, nor did he believe that the human intellect is so simplistic that learning can or should be stair-stepped that way. The taxonomy is simply a way to categorize different kinds of human learning that Bloom said are mutually supportive and necessary.

Here are examples of how both good and poor approaches might look in one aspect of a middle level language arts curriculum:

	GRADE 7	GRADE 8
P O O R	Students will identify five types of text structure (sequential, compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, description).	Students will compare and contrast the five types of text structure (sequential, compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, description) and give examples of each.
	<i>In the above examples the unit outcome in grade 7 uses one knowledge level verb only... and that clearly doesn't qualify the outcome as being in the "high achievement" domain. The unit outcome in grade 8 moves the same content field into the analysis and application categories of Bloom's Taxonomy, something that could just as easily have been done in the seventh grade.</i>	
B E T T E R	<i>In the examples shown below there is a greater effort to make both unit outcomes "high achievement" in the sense multiple aspects of Bloom's Taxonomy are represented in each. In grade 7 the outcome includes knowledge, comprehension, application, and evaluation. In grade 8 the outcome includes analysis, application and evaluation, with those categories spiraled up from grade 7 in terms of greater reflection and cognitive engagement.</i>	
	Students will identify and define the five types of text structure (sequential, compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, description), give examples of each, and justify their examples according to the definitions.	Students will compare and contrast the five types of text structure (sequential, compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, description) in terms of their intended purpose for influencing the reader, and write and orally present two essays that effectively represent two of the types of text.

Another illogical approach to the business of wording as associated with *scope and sequence* is the idea that intentions for student learning can be stated much the same way for each grade (such is often the case with state standards), and that the individual teacher (or test maker) should decide how those intentions are to be interpreted for each grade level. That is one reason why the so-called tested indicators have become important. So, instead of changing the standard and benchmark for each grade, the test-creator gives teachers tested *indicators*. Where there are no tested indicators, it is left to the teacher to decide what should be emphasized in terms of assignments and student activities (frequently with official suggestions as to how teachers might make and act on such instructional decisions). CLI has long asked subject area committees to create curricula in ways that actually express degrees of difficulty within the wording of the high achievement unit outcome and its components, as shown in the second examples in the above table.