

A New Suit for Social Studies: Working with Pre-service Teachers and Unit Building - Using the Understanding by Design Model as a Guide

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Abstract

With the rise of accountability through educational programs measured results on standardized tests focused mainly on the fields of mathematics and reading in the schools, the content of the social studies area is often not given the degree of importance needed in the curriculum. The common approaches to the development of social studies and central units, often center on presentation of facts, and do little to increase the importance of social studies as a major component of the curriculum. Review of the literature dealing with social studies curriculum and planning shows that a new approach to social studies is necessary for the content to be seen as part of the curriculum as important as mathematics and science. The new approach needs to emphasize even deeper levels of understanding calling for a planning process focused on the "big idea" concepts that allow for applications of knowledge and not just deal with the facts. In secondary social studies methods class efforts are needed to help pre-service teacher to adapt this approach to the planning and delivery of social studies.

خلاصة:

مع ازدياد درجة المساءلة عبر نتائج برامج تربوية قيست بموجب اختبارات معيارية تركزت بصفة رئيسة على حقل الرياضيات والقراءة في المدارس، نجد محتوى حقل الدراسات الاجتماعية لم يحض بالقدر المطلوب من الأهمية ضمن المنهج. إن الأساليب الشائعة لتطوير الدراسات الاجتماعية والوحدات المركزية غالباً ما تركز على عرض الحقائق، ولا يُعمل إلا القليل من أجل إضفاء المزيد من الأهمية على الدراسات الاجتماعية بوصفها مكوناً رئيساً من مكونات المنهج. وتكشف مراجعة الأدبيات المتعلقة بمنهج الدراسات الاجتماعية وتخطيطها عن ضرورة إيجاد أسلوب جديد للنظر إلى المحتوى كونه جزءاً من المنهج لا يقل أهمية عن الرياضيات والعلوم. وينبغي للأسلوب الجديد أن يشدد على مستويات من الفهم أكثر عمقاً تتطلب عملية تخطيط تركز على المفاهيم التطبيقية التي تتيح الفرصة لتطبيقات المعرفة وعدم الاكتفاء بالتعامل مع الحقائق فقط. وفي طرائق تدريس العلوم الاجتماعية في المدارس الثانوية تقوم الحاجة إلى بذل الجهود داخل قاعة الدرس لغرض مساعدة المدرسين قبل ممارستهم مهنة التدريس لتبني هذا الأسلوب من تخطيط الدراسات الاجتماعية وتقديمها.

As an educator in the Education Department at a small liberal arts college in Western Pennsylvania, I teach a course entitled: Teaching Secondary Social Studies. Students take this course at the end of their educational program prior to the student teaching experience. As in most educational method courses, students create an extended unit dealing with one of the areas of the social sciences as a major requirement for the course. The unit serves as culminating performance activity where students demonstrate their abilities to apply knowledge and skills from social science content area courses and to refine teaching and pedagogy skills through the creation of a well planned and organized social studies units appropriate for learners at the secondary level. This assignment evaluates a pre-service teacher's ability to plan and create activities for use in the real world of secondary education. These are worthy goals and worthy plans, but over the past few years I have been disappointed in the final products created by students.

In general the majority of unit skimmed the surface in relation to the concepts and ideas pre-service teachers attempted to achieve in their hypothetical classrooms. The units did not address higher level thinking skills, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, through the materials or the activities associated with the units. The basic facts in the units were well covered, the organization included all the elements required for traditional units, and the activities matched the standards and objectives set for the units. But the units lacked activities that reached a depth of the understanding of the concepts and objectives. The units were adequate in the traditional sense, but lacked the "Big

Picture” denying opportunities for learners to recognize and make connections to aspects of the concepts that were outside the confines of the prepared unit and to reach higher levels of thinking about the concepts.

Too often, when an assignment fails to achieve its goals, the teacher decides that the failure arises from the skills or lack of skills of pre-service teachers. The author’s reflections on the problem, however, produced a belief that students need an exposure to a model that the author did not provide in the assignment. Based on this conclusion the author reviewed the literature related to delivery systems for social studies units and lessons. The literature review centered on models that would help pre-service teachers achieve an approach that required a deeper understanding of materials and provided connections that aid students in reaching this goal.

This paper details the author’s search for a model that produces the desired outcome of providing opportunities for learners to achieve deep levels of understanding and to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the concepts of the unit. This quest is divided into sections that include; a review of the literature concerning models of delivery, an examination of pre-service teachers and their interactions with various models examined, the decision to employ the Understanding by Design model, an examination of changing modalities of assessment and its impact on social studies, the impact of politics on approaches to social studies, and the reaction students introduced to Understanding by Design and their use of that model as a mode of delivery.

Review of the Literature / How Did We Get Where We Are?

When reviewing the literature related to the development of an effective approach to a social studies curriculum the author found an article from 2003 that referred to an article from 1960. The article by Shirley Engle, entitled “Decision Making: the Heart of Social Studies Instruction,” expressed many of the viewpoints that became popular building blocks of a social studies curriculum. These viewpoints included analyzing past events in relation to contemporary situations, discussing varied interpretations of events, expanding beyond the textbook and utilizing data firsthand, and rejecting approaches to social studies that merely present the factual materials without providing students an opportunity to make decisions based on analysis and synthesis of materials and to apply constructed conclusions to make effective decisions (Pahl 2003). This article served as an early alert to the direction of social studies curriculum in the twenty-first century. Perhaps this was a call that came too early and did not take into account the difficulties of changing not only curriculum but teachers’ approaches to changes in delivery and their willingness to embrace change. Likewise, the sixties were a time of sweeping reforms in education such as open classrooms and informal approaches to the education process. The winds of change passed by the support needed for curriculum changes in social studies education. Innovations in social studies curriculum would not come back into vogue until the late sixties with an emphasis on national and international political and economic experiences caused by a re-examination of the Viet Nam experience (Goetz 1994).

Following the various reform movements of the sixties, educational systems in the seventies viewed social studies curriculum in light of cognitive research. A “cognitive revolution” found its origins in the fifties and took root in effective planning for student learning. The movement to constructivism in education embraced the philosophies of Vygotsky and Piaget (Brown 1999). Teacher resistance to change erected barriers to change in social studies curriculum that involved active student participation and the embraced “big ideas.” Slowly, teachers of social studies adopted an approach that involved active thinking and application of skills and knowledge (Wassermann 1992). By the later years of the seventies, social studies courses employed delivery systems that involved students in an active role and utilized teachers as coaches or facilitators rather than merely imparters of knowledge.

By the early and mid-eighties many social studies educators viewed constructivism as a threatening deviation from traditional approaches and the cause for the lack of basic knowledge of the social sciences. The “back to basics movement” and the impact of the publication of “A Nation at Risk” supplied proof that social studies curricular changes moved in the wrong direction. Social studies curriculum and approaches to effective teaching retreated to traditional text book driven approaches popular prior to the cognitive swing toward constructivism (Goetz 1994). The rise of educational accountability and its reliance on standardized testing took precedence over providing a curriculum that emphasized on decision making based on reviewing facts from differing perspectives. The issue of effective types of

assessment forced a major change in the curricular approaches to social studies (Jadallah 2000).

According to Shaughnessy and Haladyna (1985) and Lounsbury (1988), the emphasis on the basics created a situation in which social studies transformed into a boring subject centered on the past and had little impact on functioning in the contemporary world. Social studies became the least popular of subjects, as expressed by students marching through the typical school curriculum. However just when social studies curriculums reached a low point in the educational system, technology offered an avenue that could lead social studies to higher levels of student interest. Peha (1995) suggests that from the mid nineties to the present the use and application of the Internet as an effective teaching tool to enhance interest and display connections to a global society and the utilization of CD ROMs as an effective teaching tool brightened the future for social studies curriculum. Hope (1996) presents a similar point of view. One approach to increase the effectiveness of social studies curriculum connected events from various perspectives. Students constructed learning and knowledge through an understanding of how events were interrelated, rather than memorizing isolated events and facts attained through direct instruction (National Council of the Social Studies 1994). The connections between the integration of technology into the classroom environment and updated classroom delivery provided a positive hope for the future of social studies. But the lack of training for effective technology use (Ross 1991) and the lack of desire for many teachers to adapt new teaching strategies (Hope 1996) proved to be major obstacles to innovations in social studies

curriculum. Increased emphasis on standardized testing as a measure of educational accountability also slowed reform. Teachers, fearful of the accountability thrust upon them through standardized testing, relied on traditional methods of presenting materials with emphasis on content rather than on inquiry or critical thinking skills. A number of critics expounded the idea that a recognized curriculum centering on specific content areas in social studies should be emphasized, as presented by Hirsch's Cultural Literacy and the knowledge considered representative of student needs through standardized testing (Risinger and Garcia 1995). More time in the classroom was spent covering what would be on the test than creating critical thinkers. The materials and delivery modality centered on content in the traditional textbook and lecture approach (Vogler 2005) (Gerwin 2004). Ironically, at the same time complaints arose that social studies curriculums presented the surface of complex topics with little or no depth of thinking skills and understanding. By the middle to the latter part of the nineties social studies curriculums stood at a cross roads either they had to reform their methods or they would become one of the less valued parts of the school's curriculum.

By the start of the twenty-first century, the standards movement prompted social studies curriculums to become more active in relation to materials and presentation modality. Educators able to recognize the potential of a standard driven approach reviewed the standards in the context the application of constructivism. Jadallah (2000) presents scenarios in which teachers encouraged students to find the connections between events and to develop student-

constructed concepts. Teachers examined teaching approaches from a new perspective; “that the time for these ideas had come.” Gordon (1998) supports the idea of utilizing real-world problem solving, challenging students to analyze and apply information and skills, to promise students an opportunity to recognize relevance of the content matter. Inquiry approaches provided students with opportunities to cover materials in an interdisciplinary manner and to recognize their own achievement in applying skills and knowledge in reaching informed decisions (Foster, Padgett 1999). Even the thematic approach underwent an updating as a method for problem-based learning. The thematic approach provided a conceptual means by which to organize information in the context of connections between events and elements of relevant concepts (Howard 1999). The varied approaches to teaching social studies had to be viewed in the curricular construction arena and similarities in the approaches had to create a curricular approach that provided a positive environment. Innovations in social studies education required the recognition of similar curricular elements that best met the needs of teachers and learners.

A well planned and organized format to aid teachers in social studies curriculum planning will result in positive change in social education. The use of technology and materials outside the traditional textbook requires that teachers utilize new approaches for effective curriculum planning. As presentation modalities change, the assessment process must also change (Omiunota, 2003). In the context of change, providing new perspectives for pre-service teachers is of major importance since it is so easy for this

group to backslide to traditional approaches of teaching and curriculum planning (Wilson, Readence, et.al. 2002). In any battle between the importance of content delivery and reflective approaches to teaching and learning leading to change the first victory must take place in the training process of teachers. Pre-service teachers employ a reflective approach and willingness to try new avenues leading to change in delivery, curriculum planning, and assessment. The training period for teachers should encourage them to try new approaches without the fear of number controlled accountability. Pre-service teachers must feel secure in the context of experimentation of new learning and teaching processes (Christensen, Wilson, Anders, et al. 2001). More than most other subjects social studies has been caught up in the cultural wars that relate to the fears of international terrorism, national debates on immigration, and the realization that we do live in a global society that requires an understanding of cultures outside the sphere of our own national perspective (Ross, Marker 2005). New approaches to social studies curricular development must meet the needs of students if we expect for them to effectively deal with the contemporary world.

Pre-Service Teachers and Social Studies

Improvements in pre-service teacher training arise in method classes that emphasize the effective utilization of active learning approaches and deeper levels of understanding of concepts and materials. Pre-service teachers should also be exposed to a wide repertoire of teaching strategies including simulations, projects, and effective use of technology to present and assess student's

levels of understanding. Pre-service teacher training provides opportunities to apply knowledge and skills through pre-service field experiences prior to the student teaching experience. The knowledge and use of national and state standards as a framework for logical well-planned lessons must also be emphasized providing a connection between content materials and concepts in the context of teaching and learning (Morin 1996).

Through methods courses pre-service teachers recognize the importance of standards in the development of effective lessons. Standards are a measurable outcome of lessons and serve as the driving force in the lesson planning process. This belief is expressed in the context of the assessment of specific outcomes as linked to concepts that students will be held accountable for at various levels of understanding. This does not put lessons into a lockstep of presentation modalities or limit the types of activities because of the broad aspects of most standards. The broadness of standards affords pre-service teachers an opportunity to expand teaching strategies and to expand expectations for what students will know and be able to do and to recognize connections between differing and similar concepts. The use of standards as a guide applies clarity to lesson and unit outcomes and provides an effective means by which to assess student learning in an organized manner (McArthur 2004). Following this same premise provides insight into the creation of a unit with clear expectations and outcomes. The unit provides opportunities to progress from facts through generalizations and concepts to the development of theories or predictions. This progression demonstrates a student's ability to demonstrate understandings of

relationships and connections of materials covered through a series of lessons. The use of standards as a starting point for the planning of a unit develops a deeper inquiry into specific topic areas of the unit. The creation of anchor questions that continue throughout the unit is an effective means by which to drive the unit and also make clear expectations of student understanding and knowledge at the completion of the unit. These standard-driven questions are invaluable in the creation, presentation, and assessment of the unit. When the teacher asks the right questions the student is guided to reach the outcomes of the unit. This design approach is the designing backwards process, a process in which the teacher first decides where the students should be in terms of skills and understanding at the end of a unit, as reflected by standards, and then plans activities to reach those skills and knowledge (Benson1998).

Activities throughout a unit challenge students' needs and match various students' learning styles to selected teaching strategies. The presentation of an inquiry approach exposes pre-service teachers to recognizing differences between traditional classroom environments that view learning as information transfer or as a simple increase in knowledge and innovative classrooms that provide opportunities for students to construct personal understanding of concepts and generalizations. Effective unit planning expresses constructs and provides activities that enhance students' abilities and knowledge while reaching a level of deeper understanding of concepts. This planning approach provides pre-service teachers with a means by which to teach for a deeper understanding in the

context of preplanned outcomes frame-worked by standards. (Rose 2005).

The author often points out to his pre-service teachers that most schools have curriculums that are a mile wide but only an inch deep. This well-worn educational phrase provides insight into effective unit planning. At the start of the planning process teachers frame the specific questions that drive lessons and units. At the same time teachers examine their planning process in relation to the following questions:

- When comparing the quantity and coverage of material to the depth of student understanding, which factor should have more importance attached to it?
- Do opportunities exist for students to demonstrate the ability to make connections between concepts in the context of a unit theme?
- Are the strategies and activities for the student-centered unit involving students in higher order thinking skills rather than memorizing facts as an end in themselves?

The teacher-planner answers to these questions can result in a paradigm shift in relation to curriculum planning and the presentation of materials (Caron 2004). If the teacher seeks a deeper understanding for learners, an “Issues-Centered Teaching Approach” built around the utilization of central questions, as suggested by Onosko (1992) is an excellent model to follow. However, this approach is not without some major difficulties. Pre-service teachers have a great deal of trouble disassociating themselves from the teaching techniques they experienced as learners, often a teacher-centered and text-centered teaching style. This model also requires decisions related to

what materials to cover in the unit since the constraints of time may force the teacher to choose between the level of understanding to be expected and the amount of material to be covered. Discussing these choices and concerns in method classes allows pre-service teachers to evaluate which approaches work best for them in specific situations (Kohlmeier and O'Brien, 2004). The willingness of pre-service teachers to give up some of their control by adopting a student centered approach also creates difficulties since it forces both teachers and students to assume different roles in the classroom environment. Pre-service teachers practice these approaches to reach a level of comfort with approaches that they have not experienced as learners. Pre-service teachers also must recognize the need to relate types of assessment to types of teaching and learning approaches. Assessments are valid for use to assess student specific abilities and skills when they relate to the teaching and approach applied in the unit (Caron 2004).

New Strategies Call for an Examination of Assessment Approaches

Effective teachers link strategies utilized to present and deliver materials in the classroom to assessments that best meet the needs of specific objectives for lessons and learning modules. As delivery and organization of social studies curriculum approaches change, assessment techniques, to be effective and valid, must also change. Standards play a major role in the context of the standardized testing movement at both the state and national levels. Standardized testing should not control curriculum and curriculum approaches to a degree that narrows the

establishment of social studies goals to meet only the standards emphasized by such tests (Risinger 1996). Accountability based on standardized testing concerns many pre-service teachers. This concern centers on the growing control of both the delivery system and curriculum structure by a testing authority outside the classroom. Such concerns limit the desire and willingness for classroom teachers and pre-service teachers to assume an effective position of leadership for content and methods in curriculum planning. Standardized testing gains the power to drive the curriculum at the expense of needed changes in the social studies curriculum (Gerwin 2003). The impact of high school graduation examinations in some states further limit teachers' approaches to classroom practices. The emphasis on graduation assessments results in a continuance of teacher-centered approaches with major emphasis on the textbook. This approach emphasizes lower-level questioning in the context of knowledge and comprehension and sacrifices learning at a depth of understanding for enhancing testing skills and providing test readiness, with an ultimate goal of higher test scores. If a real depth of understanding and connecting of concepts is a desired outcome of learning, emphasis must be removed from test taking skills for standardized tests (Vogler 2005). In many states the standardized tests center on reading and math skills and are not concerned with content areas like social studies. However, in some states standardized tests assess social studies knowledge. An examination of many of these states reveals that there is a disjointed relationship between what is tested and what is taught. But this gap appears to be lessening as districts revise their curriculums to match state

standardized assessment expectations. Since state and national testing is not likely to decrease in the near future, standardized testing drives the curriculum in ever increasing numbers of schools. This relationship between testing and curriculum is an obstacle to the development of a depth of understanding approach that is effective in social studies education (Buckles 2001).

In the context of the new strategies and approaches to the teaching of social studies, we need to examine the place of social studies in the high-stakes testing environment. Social studies appears to have a limited level of importance in testing and therefore, has less and less importance as a valued part of the curriculum. Efforts to make social studies acceptable in this high stakes testing environment lead to additional problems including:

- Utilization of norm-referenced testing results to make decisions related to curriculum materials that do not match testing (Clancy 2000)
- Improvement in test scores measuring knowledge taking priority over depth of understanding curriculum that enhance social studies application skills (Falk 2002)
- Relation of standardized test score data to decisions on individual students (Vars 2001)
- In response to these problems and issues the following suggestions are provided:
- Take an interdisciplinary approach to social studies by incorporating into other content areas currently held at high value - like reading
- View student assessment results and progress in the context of social studies standards - making judgments in relation to social studies specifically

- Utilize “Backwards Planning” stressing standards as the starting point for curriculum planning and effective assessment of student skills and knowledge. (Vogler 2003)

Assessment methods that are performance-based effectively assess skills and depth of understanding. Research supports the utilization of a Project-Based approach to provide a higher level of depth of understanding, in particular in the understanding of principles that link concepts. If a deep level of understanding is the goal set by the instructor, the implementation of a student-centered performance based approach provides the proper environment for the application of higher order thinking skills. If a performance based approach in the context of presentation and materials is selected, performance based assessments examine students’ levels of understanding and application skills. Pre-service teachers are exposed to various modalities of assessment to prepare them to implement various curricular approaches and to match appropriate assessment techniques to them (Gijbels 2005).

Movement toward New Approaches to Social Studies and Curriculum Planning

A review of recent literature calls for increasing emphasis on the social studies and managing content so it is more student-centered and connected to the interests and needs of contemporary students. Articles and research discuss the creation of student-centered learning environments, efforts to make materials and content more

authentic to students, creation and implementation of thematic and issue-centered approaches to curriculum planning, and efforts to deal with curriculum building through the use of essential questions and backwards planning - from standards to objectives.

To increase the values of social studies as a content area of major importance, it is suggested that supporters for this effort should be more proactive in the contemporary political setting. This proactive approach evokes an effort to expose students to various ideas and concepts in a critical manner. Student assignments should be reflective rather than centering on the learning of terms and concepts at lower levels of understanding (Singer 2005). If the importance of social studies to deal with aspects of citizenship is to be enhanced, the constant effort to provide opportunities for students to understand materials and recognize connections in the context of various concepts must be carried out. This approach will make materials relevant to students and assessments should reflect students' ability to voice these connections and assume the responsibility of forming informal conclusions based on recognition of concept connections (Endacott 2005). The creation of creating thinking and inquiry tasks forms a major part of this reflective approach. Students dealing with reflection activities and inquiry tasks work toward achieving insights that provide relevance and ownership for students. Such successfully planned activities can be analyzed as to why such activities were successful and be filed away for future applications (Memory, Yoder, Bolinger, et al. 2004). The introduction of pre-service teachers to these approaches is a vital part of teacher training. It is far too easy for pre-

service and beginning teachers to fall back on the experiences of their own classroom environments, environments that all too often consisted of traditional direct teaching approaches centered on text materials and little else. If pre-service teachers are exposed to differing classroom approaches and curriculum planning and are provided with opportunities to employ these approaches, students will reflect on successes and failures and improve their teaching techniques (Christensen, Wilson, Sungal, et al. 2004).

The creation of feelings of empathy for situations in the context of historical situations enhances student relevance. This approach centers on efforts to bring about higher levels of authenticity and is securely linked to major aspects of the reflective process. Students are provided with opportunities to deal with elements of individual perception and interpretation through the use of historical evidence and sources outside of the text. This type of presentation also connects with the importance of an interdisciplinary approach allowing students to make connections with other academic subject areas. A student-centered review of materials in this manner allows for decision making and emphasis on skills that can be applied in all content areas and raises the value of social studies as an area where relevance across curricular lines can occur (Foster 1999). An example is the recognition of the connections between technology development and the impact such development has had on historical periods and elements of society in relation to major changes. Central essential questions on a unit dealing with the connections between a time period and technology development must be seen by students as

arching across curricular line, while at the same time connecting concepts (Sumrall, Schillinger, 2004).

Teachers recognize teachable moments regardless of the selection of a specific approach in the classroom. Pre-service teachers need to be exposed to numerous activities that can be applied to reach levels of deeper understanding to evaluate students' levels of comprehension. Such activities as journaling, comparing historical events, dealing with evidence, and analyzing photographs and media deepen students' understanding of concepts. Each offer opportunities to assess deep levels of understanding and each are linked to higher level thinking skills. These activities are also broad enough and student-centered enough so that they are beyond the dependence on text books and simple recall skills (Lipscomb 2002). Educational method classes lead pre-service teachers toward an understanding and application of student-centered activities. Pre-service teachers need to be made aware of strategies that can lead to this level of understanding. The simplest introduction process to such activities is to aid pre-service teachers in the understanding and use of a linking process between reading assignments and writing response activities. The integration of reading and efforts to apply these to areas of student interest through strategies like categorizing data and information, defending controversial positions and subject matter, and assuming positions based on evidence, all allow for student driven discussions and assumption of roles of leadership in relation to active and deep level learning (Gallavan, Kottler 2002). To successfully carry out these actions the activities need to be connected and linked leading sequentially to points at which

this information can be utilized to solve problems and linked to the analysis of information leading to this point of decision making. In short, pre-service teachers must be made to realize that thought and planning needs to be conducted to the structuring of these activities. Activities cannot haphazardly be thrown together with little thought as to order of such activities; rather the placement and utilization of such activities require extended thought if the activities are to lead to the expected outcomes (Gordon 1998). Activities and issues that students can identify with and feel some ownership for are major driving factors that can enhance learning at deeper levels.

Technology plays a major role as an effective tool for students to utilize in a project-based approach that encourages student-centered approaches. For effective use of technology pre-service teachers must make major commitments to the use of technology as an effective tool. One commitment concerns the time and energy required to review and evaluate materials to be utilized by students. Another commitment is the creation of an environment in which issues are conceptualized and viewed from various perspectives. For pre-service teachers who have not previously been exposed to this type of thinking the transition to committing to the effective use of technology can be difficult. Method classes should present materials and technology for pre-service teachers to review and examine. Debating, discussing, and accepting of others' views are actions that should be modeled in the methods classes as an effective approach toward assisting pre-service teachers in developing deeper learning activities (Kohlmeier and O' Brien 2004).

Understanding by Design

The examination of materials with approaches to the teaching of social studies and the formation of effective concepts of strategies and activities results in the question-- is there a planning and teaching model that achieves instructional success?

The goal of this paper is to define a model for social studies curriculum that requires the use of higher order thinking skills and provides for a deeper level of understanding of concepts and materials. A model provides the advantage of giving pre-service teachers structure while planning and implementing a unit. Pre-service teachers demonstrate a need for structure based on their concern that they must design lessons that are coherent and effective. Pre-service teachers search for a conceptual framework not a prescriptive plan. The framework must direct the selection of pedagogical choices that anchor the lesson which pre-service teachers build upon to carry knowledge into realms of deeper and higher levels of understanding. The model must also provide a level of comfort for the pre-service teachers since it is a change from traditional approaches. Providing these pre-service teachers opportunities to apply and work with this model creates an environment in which they can familiarize themselves with the structure and style of the model's approach. As with the creation of a suit various fittings may be needed to create a garment in which one can really feel comfortable.

A review of various planning models for social studies led this instructor to the Understanding by Design model. This model contains the required elements for application of higher order thinking skills and centers planning on an

issued thematic approach structured around essential questions. These questions provide an excellent link to expected standards and require active student involvement. Most important, it encourages pre-service teachers to create a connection between assignments that move toward thought-provoking focus. The author utilizes this model in methods courses to give pre-service teachers the opportunity to plan lessons that reach deeper levels of understanding and to experience this model in a classroom setting.

Pre-service teachers need a framework that is flexible enough to incorporate traditional approaches to instruction while providing opportunities to achieve levels of meaningful learning. Meaningful learning is characterized by the ability of student to transfer levels of knowledge and understanding, through a process of effective selecting, organizing and integrating of knowledge into the formation of general rules or hypothesis that allow students to make decisions based on the processing of prior and newly provided knowledge (Mayer, 2002).

When pre-service teachers create “essential” questions for their lessons, they keep materials and activities centered on the importance of the final outcomes. Joseph Onosko discussed the “central question” concepts in his writings. This central questioning technique evokes questions that are broad enough in nature to create themes for the student to pursue. Such questions can be used to approach issues that go beyond the textbook anchored units (Caron 2005). Central questions maintain a focus on the major concepts of the unit and also encourage students to go beyond a cursory review of the facts to master the unit. Central questions

deepen understanding of concepts through an inquiry approach that leads to further questions. The questions serve as the stitching that holds the material of the unit together.

If the goal of instruction is to reach levels of deeper understanding, an approach to this goal must take into account that students reveal their understanding most effectively when they are provided with real world opportunities to explain, interpret, apply, change perspective, and empathize. When applied to complex tasks, the questions provide a framework through which teachers can effectively assess student understanding. The process called "backward design" of Understanding by Design, which delays planning of activities until goals have been clarified and assessments designed, centers on the belief the overall outcomes hold the highest level of importance throughout the entire process. This approach allows pre-service teachers an opportunity to go beyond the process of mere textbook coverage and anchors an activity-oriented approach to clear priorities in relation to the selected goals. This approach also relieves the concern pre-service teachers have about reaching the broad objectives of standards. In the context of this approach standards become guideposts for outcomes rather than barriers to be assaulted (Chadwick 2004). Just as a person carefully selects a suit that is appropriate for a particular situation, one also carefully selects a model to organize instruction and curriculum planning appropriate for the goals of the instruction.

The most appealing aspect of the Understanding by Design model is the manner in which the "six facets of understanding" can be utilized as centering points for specific activities laced throughout the unit. While the facets

need not be approached in a specific order, the review of facets from explanation to self-knowledge demonstrates the need for higher level thinking skills. The utilization of student-centered activities also encourages student growth in relation to a deeper understanding of concepts. Each of the facets serves a function in relation to the final outcomes, but not all facets may be needed depending on what that outcome may be. **Explanation** provides the building blocks of information that create the structure of a unit, **Interpretation** relates to the understanding gained through pieces of knowledge, while **application** makes the knowledge meaningful since it provides opportunities to put the knowledge to use. **Perspective** considers alternative views, while **empathy** expands on the aspects of perspective stressing the affective aspects of learning. The last facet, **self-knowledge**, involves students in self-assessment providing authentic feelings of ownership for unit materials (Chadwick 2004). These facets serve as the tailoring and alterations of the unit to meet the specific expected outcomes of students as they work through the unit materials.

The Understanding by Design model presents instruction in a structured manner that enhances the teaching and learning processes:

- Big ideas and essential questions are the centerpiece of the work by students
- High expectations and incentives, due to the student centered approach, provide a highly effective environment for student collaborative work

- Big ideas, essential questions, and criteria in the format of scoring rubrics are presented for student review making clear the expectations and standards
- Samples or exemplars are made available for students to review providing clarity in relation to expectations for student work
- Differentiation is provided for the manner of exploration of the presented big ideas and essential questions
- Students have an opportunity to delve more deeply into all the integrated aspects of subject matter
- More performance centered approaches are incorporated into the assessment process (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998)

The Understanding by Design model provides a structure to help pre-service teachers comprehend that the connections between the selection of outcomes, the selection of knowledge to be presented for student review, the selection of activities to allow students to apply knowledge and skills, and the selection of assessment processes are not separate actions. Rather these selections are a combination of required orchestrated actions that flow like currents in a river, providing differing levels of ebbs and flows through various currents but maintaining an ongoing flow toward identified outcomes. As with a well tailored suit no one component should overwhelm the overall presentation of the final garment.

Conclusions

For the past two semesters the instructor has incorporated the Understanding by Design model in the instructional method classes. In general the caliber of the units being created by pre-service teachers has been greatly enhanced in relation to the implementation of higher order thinking skills. The ability to align objectives and activities with expected state standards has been improved through the implementation of a backwards planning design and the utilization of issue driven questions. Students overcome the problems presented when they only have the model of past teachers' traditional approaches to instruction. The issues approach also provides opportunities for the pre-service teacher to recognize the possibilities for interdisciplinary approaches crossing curricular lines and establishing connections with other content areas in particular math and reading.

The reaction of pre-service teachers to the Understanding by Design model has been highly positive. Comments presented by students as to the impact of this approach over the past two semesters include:

Comments of Pre-Service Teachers Exposed to the Planning Process

“The Understanding by Design approach aids in demonstrating why social studies is important to students since it allows for connections to other content areas more than most traditional planning approaches.”

“The inclusion of areas of planning for multiple perspectives and empathy bring feelings into the creation of units that make the materials come alive.”

“This approach is an important tool for educators. The components of the six facets of understanding call for students to go far beyond the traditional, clichéd verbiage that is spouted by educators in the past! They demand that the student not only personalize the information learned; but incorporate, present, exhibit alternative understandings, and ultimately dissect what they have learned in a truly individualized sense. This is true understanding.”

“It is a waste of time and energy for a teacher to rush through a lot of material, without attempting to reach real understanding and think that the students are really learning anything. This approach provides for effective understanding and is important to enhance teaching even if it lessens the breadth of materials covered.”

“This planning process allows for students to start from a broad issue and demonstrate the connections to important facts. It makes the student aware of why the facts are important.”

“I now realize that it is absolutely necessary for social studies teachers to utilize a model of instruction that stresses the six facets of understanding in the light of new perspectives and the context of globalization.”

“This planning process is a good example of many of the things I hope that someday I will be able to pass on to my students within the social studies discipline. I think the model is what every teacher should strive for in the classroom”

“Planning units this way has reinforced what I feel is necessary for a student to truly comprehend the material, not just regurgitate information I have provided. I find this process helpful on a practical level. Not only will it

influence my lesson plans but also my ability to recognize learning and understanding in my students.”

The improvements in the planning process and the final units after the implementation of the Understanding by Design model as a major framework used in the unit planning process have had a positive impact both on completed units and pre-service teachers belief in the importance of expanding the limits of student understanding. The utilization of a new approach to planning units provides an avenue to emphasis on the utilization of higher order thinking skills. The time is now for social studies curriculum to begin wearing a new suit to change its image of providing lower level thinking skills. This analogy of a new suit suggests that each unit will need alterations to create a garment in which one can feel comfortable and wants to wear. The essential question can serve as the stitching that holds the suit or the unit together. And as with a well tailored suit no one unit component should overwhelm the overall presentation of the final garment. This new suit will be worn by more and more social studies teachers as we move forward toward new approaches to social studies instruction.

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