

DePaul Center for Urban Education Research Base

Organized Active Learning and Focused Assessment

Core Element	Connections Structure	Basis in Research	Relevant Research
Teachers organize active learning and focused assessments within clear structure focused on core curriculum	Five week units Weekly development from introduction (Monday) through assessment (Thursday) and revision/expansion (Friday) Daily Lesson: Focus-Act-Report structure	Effective schools have a balanced curriculum and a systematic internal assessment.	Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986. Tyler, 1949. Wiggins and McTighe, 1998. Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole, 2000. Jacobs, 1989.

The following research supports the emphasis on this element of the Connections structure:

This report examines the impact that teacher behavior can have on the achievement of students, particularly of students living in poverty. Rosenshine and Stevens concluded that those teachers whose classrooms made the greatest gains in reading or mathematics usually used the following procedures:

- Begin a lesson with a short review of previous learning.
- Begin a lesson with a short statement of goals.
- Present new material in small steps, providing for student practice after each step.
- Give clear and detailed instructions and explanations.
- Provide a high level of active practice for all students.
- Ask a large number of questions, check for student understanding and obtain responses from all students.
- Guide students during initial practice.
- Provide systematic feedback and corrections.
- Provide explicit instruction and practice for individual exercises and, where necessary, monitor students during their individual work.

It is easier to assimilate new information and easier to use prior knowledge for problem solving, when one has more connections and interconnections, stronger ties between the connections, and a better organized knowledge structure. When the knowledge structure on a particular topic is large and well-connected, new information is more readily acquired and prior knowledge is more readily available for use. Having a well-connected network means that any one piece of information can serve to help retrieve the entire pattern. Having strong connections and a richness of relationships enables one to retrieve more pieces of the pattern. When information is "meaningful" to students, they have more points in their knowledge structures to which they can attach new information.

Education is a process of developing, enlarging, expanding, and refining our students' knowledge structures.

B. Roshenshine, "Chapter 10—Advances in Research on Instruction", in J.W. Lloyd, E.J. Kameanui, and D. Chard (Eds.) (1997) *Issues in Educating Students with Disabilities*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum

Teachers are designers. An essential act of our profession is the design of curriculum and learning experiences to meet specified purposes. We are also designers of assessments to diagnose student needs to guide our teaching and to enable us, our students, and others (parents and administrators) to determine whether our goals have been achieved; that is, did the students learn and understand the desired knowledge (p. 7)?

The designer must first clarify what is most worthy of understanding—in need of uncovering within a unit. Considering appropriate local, state, and national standards documents helps frame the target and prioritize instruction. The designer continues to refer to design criteria to narrow and sharpen the focus of the unit, using the filters. The final product is a unit framed in terms of essential questions, which points clearly and explicitly toward a big idea (p. 19).

Ralph Tyler underscored in his seminal brief book on design, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Tyler, 1949), the need to think about curricular matters from the perspective of desired outcomes and the learner's needs. He proposed three criteria for effective organization—*continuity*, *sequence*, and *integration*—to show how the logic of curriculum should suit the learner's not the experts' sense of order (p. 154).

G. Wiggins and J. McTighe, Understanding by Design, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998.

Systematic assessment of pupil progress figured prominently in this study. In the most effective schools systematic assessment was related to students' growth in reading fluency and to their retelling performance. These were curriculum-based, classroom assessments intended to provide information for monitoring individual student progress and to shape individual and classroom (and occasional schoolwide) curricular and instructional decisions. These classroom-level data provided a form of internal accountability (to one's colleagues) while providing teachers with a useful benchmark in each student's progress (p. 141).

B. M. Taylor, D. P. Pearson, K. Clark, and S. Walpole, "Effective Schools and Accomplished Teachers: Lessons about Primary-Grade Reading Instruction in Low-Income Schools", Elementary School Journal, 101(2), 2000.