

Components of a Curriculum Plan

To meet the standards for curriculum design, a teacher must submit a curriculum plan consisting of the following components:

Overview / Course Description

This one paragraph statement is titled and characterizes the content of an elementary grade level or secondary course. It is the type of brief summary of the curriculum for a subject area that could be provided to parents or printed in a course catalogue.

Unit Titles

The names of the units of study are presented for each grade level or course in the sequence of study. Each title identifies a part of the whole and provides a clear indication of the central topic for the unit of study. As a general rule, there would be 3-5 units per semester.

Unit Plan

For each unit of study, a plan is designed using a template, which includes a concept map, unit title, focus questions, content expectations, assessment tasks, key concepts, connections, and instructional resources:

Abstract

A one-paragraph description of the featured unit of study that characterizes the subject matter to be studied and states very generally what students are expected to learn and the types of learning activities that will be conducted to provide opportunities for learning.

Overarching Question

This question should hold several units of study together. The question should help students understand what multiple units of study in a particular subject have in common.

Focus Questions

One to three questions to guide inquiry during the unit of study. These are not questions the answers to which are certain or scripted by the teacher. The questions are problematic to the learner; there is not a single, correct, predetermined answer. A focus question is open-ended and divergent rather than closed and convergent. Each focus question should require construction of understanding of key concepts rather than mere reproduction of information by students. The answer to a focus question would have to be expressed in sentences or even paragraphs. Single words or short phrases would be insufficient.

Graphic Organizer

A “Unit Map” that translates the main idea of the unit of study into student-friendly language and easy-to-understand “chunks” or topics of content. The graphic organizer is read so that when students start reading the Unit Title followed by the words in the organizer, it should create a complete sentence. This helps students understand how the parts of the unit are connected.

Key Concepts

At most six concepts would be listed. Each should be highly pertinent to the topic of the unit and appropriate to the developmental level of students. These concepts should be “powerful ideas” of major significance to a discipline, not merely new vocabulary terms. They are central ideas of the unit - the ones the teacher intends students to understand and use for a lifetime. Construction of an understanding of these concepts by students is a major learning priority of the unit. Students are expected to use these concepts when generalizing about the content of the unit. The following are examples of key concepts from various disciplines: natural resource, culture, nonviolence, natural selection, voice, satire, rhythm, harmony, religious liberty, equilibrium price, genetic inheritance, molecular structure, solar system, electrical energy.

Intellectual Processes

Ways of thinking that the students will be engaged in during the unit of study. Intellectual processes are those mental operations that enable one to acquire new knowledge, apply that knowledge in both familiar and unique situations, and control the mental processing that is required for knowledge acquisition and use. One important intent of specifying the intellectual processes in a unit is to make the teaching of these processes explicit.

Content Standards and Expectations

The unit plan contains content expectations (intended learning outcomes), which represent academic disciplines and integrate knowledge with skills. Content expectations should be adapted from appropriate national, state, or local district content standards. Each content expectation should be tailored to the content of the unit and may have to be customized to fit the context of the unit rather than merely be repeated verbatim from the external standards document. For each content expectations there should be a number code linking it to the content standard(s) from which it is derived.

Assessment Tasks

All content expectations for a unit should be assessed. Each assessment task should assess at least one content expectation and preferably more than one. Fewer tasks are better than many. A well-designed unit might have two or three assessment tasks. In parentheses following each task, the code number(s) of the content expectation(s) it assesses would be specified. Each task should be presented briefly, in one or two succinct sentences, and

should be expressed as a task to be performed by students. Implicit in each task should be the actual product (discourse, performance, or tangible object) to be generated by students as a result of performing the task.

Instructional Resources

A selected repertoire of high quality resources that would equip a teacher to teach the unit is listed here. It might include a portion of a textbook with its accompanying teacher's manual, a story, a video, a computer software program, a DVD, an Internet website, a sand table, costumes, a microscope, a script or musical score, manipulatives, photos, maps, an atlas... Also appropriate would be "homemade" teacher-produced materials, perhaps a learning activity written up by a local teacher, or a set of slides with narration - the possibilities are innumerable. Published works should be listed as bibliographic citations including, author, title, publisher, and copyright date. Actual pages or portions of a copyrighted work being recommended for use in teaching the particular unit should be specified. A citation should furnish sufficient information to enable a teacher to identify and locate the resource being cited.

Lesson Sequence/Best Practices

This is a listing of titles of all lessons comprising the unit of study in the order they will be taught. These lessons, taken together, represent at least two academic (or professional) disciplines and integrate knowledge with skills. For each lesson, the content of what students will learn and the procedure for learning it are presented concisely in a paragraph. Normally a lesson would last a single class period but might take longer.

The lesson plans are an expansion of the units of study and explicitly cite a sequence of activities, sample performance assessments, and applications beyond school in addition to specific grade level content expectations (elementary, middle, or high school) and key concepts. They are not meant to be an exhaustive set of lessons needed to teach a particular unit of study; rather they are meant to provide an example of how unit content might be taught. They can be adopted as is, adapted to local needs, or used to spark a teacher's own creativity.