

Session 11

Lessons for Life: Learning and Transfer

Can I Teach with a Curriculum that Promotes Deep Learning?

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In this session, several ideas stand out as helpful for transferring learning outside of the school. These ideas are:

1. Emphasize collaborative work more than the individual work typical of school environments
2. Whenever possible, use tools and technologies to solve problems as well as “mental” work, and
3. Provide opportunities for students to use knowledge in multiple contexts (Resnick, 1987, cited in Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 74)

Everyone of these ideas requires well-grounded knowledge and takes more time to teach than simple memorization of facts, especially application of knowledge in multiple contexts. “Students need time to understand the meaning of new ideas, to draw connections to other ideas, to apply what they are learning to real tasks, to determine patterns of relationships, and to practice new skills.” (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2003, pg. 190; Bransford et al., 2000, p. 58) Therefore I will follow the advice of many educators and learning theorists and work towards implementing a “less is more” curriculum in my classrooms. I will carefully select important concepts for students to explore deeply, rather than strictly follow popular “coverage” curriculum that superficially mentions lots of ideas that are never really applied or understood (Bransford et al., 2000; Bruner, 1960; Gardner, 1999).

Given the pressure to provide superficial coverage of a broad range of topics to score well on multiple choice tests that assess ability to memorize, I may encounter resistance to adopting a model “less is more” curriculum. A “less is more” curriculum develops well-grounded knowledge in students that is “fundamental to transfer” outside of the classroom. (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2003, pg. 191) At least one of my teaching credential cohorts with experience in the classroom expressed the opinion that pursuing a “less is more” approach is incompatible with the common core curriculum.

As a novice teacher, I don’t know whether I will be able to provide a “less is more” curriculum that both prepares students for transferring their skills to life and enables them to do well on assessments of common core standards. I will likely begin by adopting the most focused “proven” common core curriculum I can find, reducing time devoted to less essential topics and then devoting that time to insure that students are well-grounded in at least one or two topics. While this hybrid approach may be less time efficient for grounding students in topics than curricula promoted by leading “less is more” advocates, it is more likely to mollify administrators and parents who lack the time and knowledge needed to appreciate the limits of today’s Common Core assessments.

References

1. Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2003. *The Learning Classroom: Theory Into Practice*. Detroit: Annenberg Media.
2. J. D. Bransford, A.L. Brown, R.R. Cocking (Eds.) 2000. *Learning and transfer* (Chapter 3). In *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school* (pp. 51-78). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
3. L.B. Resnick 1987. *Education and learning to think*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
4. L.B. Resnick 1987. cited in Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000.
5. J. Bruner 1960. *The process of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
6. H. Gardner 1999. *The disciplined mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster.