Backwards Design

WHAT IS IT?

Backwards Design is a framework promoted by Wiggins and McTighe (2004) in their book Understanding by Design. Their notion of 'backwards design' was developed as a response to conventional curriculum design where content and topics are chosen first. Backwards Design focuses on desired results (learning outcomes); how these will be evidenced (assessment), and how students can experience and practice what they learn (learning activities). These elements form a road map to help ensure teaching and learning remains focused and organised. Backwards Design is underpinned by the Understanding by Design Framework and emphasises the teachers' critical role as a designer of learning.

WHY USE IT?

- Backwards design is about enhancing student learning by centering the student in the design process.
- The design provides a framework for self-reflection on teaching practice.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Backwards Design process occurs in stages: 1. Identify desired results 2. Determine acceptable evidence and 3. Plan learning experiences (see Diagram 1).

Key questions to ask in the design process

1. Identify desired results : What should students know, understand and be able to do? What content is worth understanding? What enduring understandings are desired?
2. Determine Acceptable Evidence: What will teachers accept as evidence that student understanding took place?
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction. Consider the culminating assessment task and a range of assessment methods (observations, tests, projects, etc.) throughout the course. What learning activities will best support students to achieve the learning outcomes?

For more detail, see Overview of UBD and the design template by Grant Wiggins.

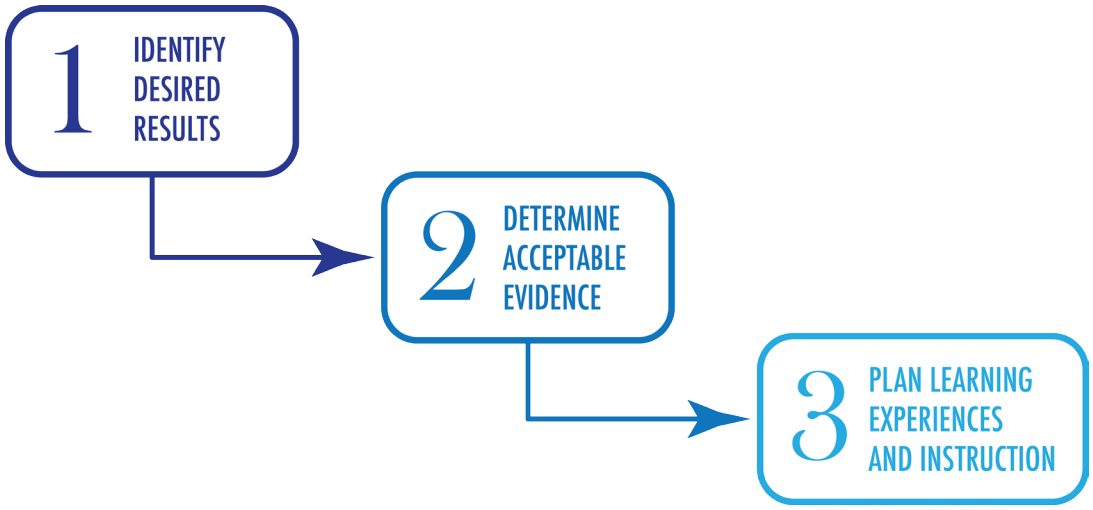

Diagram 1: Backwards Design process adapted from Wiggins and McTighe (2004)

WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER?

Wiggins and McTighe (2006) claim that:

- the terms "understanding" and "knowing" are often confused. Understanding is not merely knowledge of facts, but using facts and logic to create insightful connections (see Understanding Understanding, Chapter 2).
- though the stages show logic in design, it is not a prescriptive process. It doesn't matter where you start or how you go about it as long as you end up with a coherent design.

WHAT IF I WANT MORE?

- What is Understanding by Design? Author Jay McTighe explains - Hawker Brownlow Education [video 7:04]
- Wiggins and McTighe (2006). Understanding by Design. Pearson: Merrill Prentice Hall. p. 24. ISBN 0-13-195084-3. (Available from the UQ Library)
- Understanding by Design Framework
- UBD toolkit examples

WHAT IF I NEED SUPPORT?

For further support contact ITaLI TeachAssist