



Turning Points

TRANSFORMING MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Guide to Curriculum Development





Guide to Curriculum Development

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Acknowledgements

The Center for Collaborative Education wishes to thank all the Turning Points middle schools that have contributed to the development of this guide.

In addition, we would like to thank our team of external reviewers:

Gayle Davis, Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative

Tim Flynn, Vermont Department of Education

Tony Jackson, Disney Learning Partnership

Deborah Trotter-Kasak, Association of Illinois Middle Schools

Doug Kilmister, Expeditionary Learning

Michael Levine, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Dean Millot, New American Schools

Frederick Park, Cambridgeport School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

This guide was made possible in part by the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation.



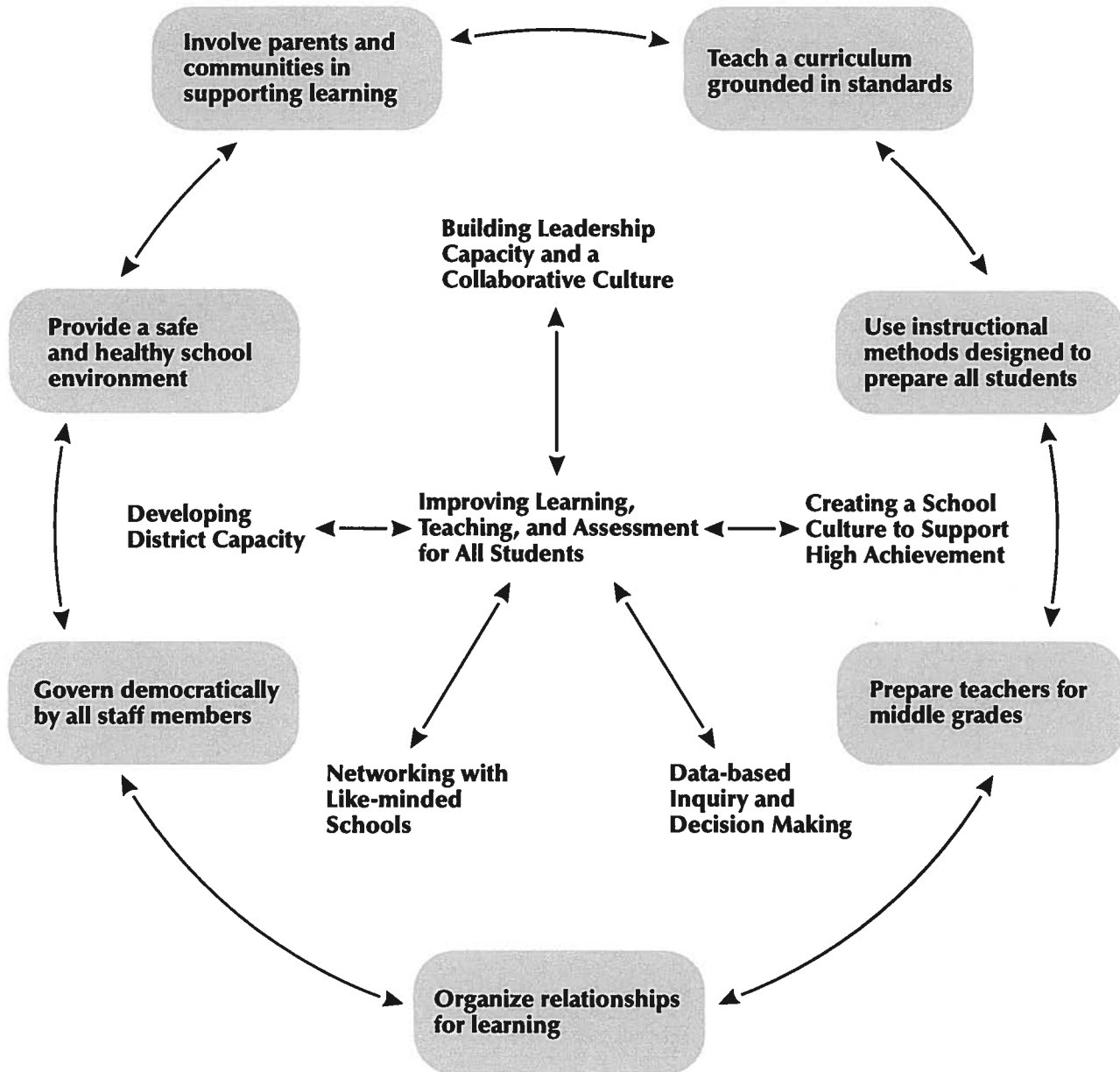
Preface

Turning Points is a national design for middle school change, coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, Massachusetts, which serves as the National Turning Points Center. The design focuses on restructuring middle schools to improve learning, teaching, and assessment for all students. It is based on the seminal *Turning Points* report issued by the Carnegie Corporation in 1989, which concentrated on the considerable risks that young adolescents face as they reach the “turning point” between childhood and adulthood.

A crucial part of this reform initiative involves the practice of Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students. Student learning increases when schools focus on understanding the unique needs and capabilities of middle school students. Turning Points schools set high expectations for every student and create curriculum, instruction, and assessment that enable students to meet those expectations.

The purpose of this guide is to communicate the Turning Points approach to curriculum development, teaching, and assessment. It offers specific tools which teachers and schools can use as they design curriculum, develop assessment tasks, and create the classroom practices that will lead to significant student learning and growth.

Turning Points Design Principles and Practices



Turning Points Principles*

- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards, relevant to the concerns of adolescents and based on how students learn best
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners
- Staff middle grade schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents, and engage teachers in ongoing professional development
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring community of shared educational purpose
- Govern democratically through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development

Six practices translate these principles into action in each school and throughout a network of Turning Points schools in a district. Within each area of practice, teacher teams, a school leadership team, and faculty committees, engage in collaborative work.

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The Six Turning Points Practices

- **Improving Learning, Teaching, and Assessment for All Students:** working collaboratively to set high standards, close the achievement gap among students, develop curriculum that promotes habits of mind and intellectual inquiry, utilize a wide range of instructional strategies and approaches, emphasize the teaching of literacy and numeracy
- **Building Leadership Capacity and a Professional Collaborative Culture:** creating a democratic school community, fostering skills and practices of strong leadership, establishing regular common planning time, embedding professional development in the daily life of the school
- **Data-based Inquiry and Decision Making:** setting a vision based on the Turning Points principles, collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data to help improve areas that most impact learning, teaching, and assessment, setting annual measurable goals
- **Creating a School Culture to Support High Achievement and Personal Development:** creating structures that promote a culture of high-quality learning and teaching, establishing small learning communities, eliminating tracking, lowering student-teacher ratios, building parent and community partnerships
- **Networking with Like-minded Schools:** participating in network meetings, summer institutes, and forums; visiting other Turning Points schools
- **Developing District Capacity to Support School Change:** building district capacity through collaboration



Introduction

Marianne Harrison teaches math and science at Jackson Middle School and shares 55 seventh graders with a social studies/language arts teacher. Her students' latest project is a good example of how she organizes her instruction to meet the unique needs of middle school students. Based on the grade-level team's cross-discipline theme of "What Is Balance?" Ms. Harrison has devised a study around the use of chemicals and how the local community balances their benefits and dangers. Knowing that middle school students are very social, she has grouped them into teams to research chemicals found in their community. One team is studying phosphates found in common household cleaning products. This group plans to research the chemical makeup of phosphates and the history of their use. Another team is studying the use of lead in the community and the occurrence of lead poisoning in the city's children.

All groups will collect data on how their chemical is used and the ways it both benefits and endangers people and the environment. The students will then analyze and synthesize their data. Ms. Harrison has asked them to make coherent arguments and significant conclusions about the use of chemicals in our society. To ensure that their school work has value beyond the school, all groups will present their findings to an organization in the community that has interest in the topic.

The work in class is organized to address diverse instructional needs of middle school students and to take advantage of their desire for variety. Ms. Harrison plans different tasks, one of which is always an active learning piece. Instead of long lectures, she gives mini-lessons on new concepts. These mini-lessons are sandwiched between an exploratory activity and students' applying the concept to their project work. The whole class then engages in a dialogue to share observations and reflect on what they have learned so far.

The educational needs of middle school students are truly unique. In no other period of PreK–12 education can one find such a wide range of physical, social, and cognitive development among students. For students, the middle school years can be a time of both great vulnerability and great responsiveness to change. These years are highly formative for behavior patterns in education and health that have enduring, lifelong significance. The challenge for middle schools is to help provide the building blocks of adolescent development and preparation for adult life.

How do we engage middle school students in a way that meets their developmental needs, pushes them to learn significantly, and prepares them for the high school years and beyond? Turning Points believes the answer lies within challenging these students with engaging and worthwhile work while supporting them with close-knit relationships.

Curriculum Development in Turning Points Schools

Developing curriculum that meets the needs of middle school students is a complex process that rarely follows a prescribed pattern. Teachers may come up with ideas for projects, themes, and activities on the way to work, in the middle of class, during a conversation with a colleague, and even in the shower. Some teachers begin with a theme while others start with habits of mind they want their students to acquire. Some teachers use state frameworks and standards as a starting point to curriculum development. Still others build a unit from an idea for a project. The purpose of this guide is not to dictate how teachers should develop their curriculum, but rather to propose that certain basic principles, supported by Turning Points work in schools, underpin curriculum development.

Middle school curriculum should respond to the unique educational and social needs of this age group; it should be based on content standards, habits of mind, and thinking skills; and promote collaborative teaching, learning, and assessment opportunities that enable all students to achieve high standards. In addition, the Turning Points model calls for middle school teachers to develop curriculum organized around themes and essential questions. Themes such as power, balance, relationships, and patterns are the big ideas that unify teaching and learning experiences. Essential questions are the two to three important questions about a theme that students and teachers consider throughout a unit in order to provide focus and stimulate inquiry. Finally, the Turning Points approach to curriculum development integrates teaching and learning with a process of ongoing assessment. Ongoing assessments, both formal and informal, give teachers, administrators, and students an understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to continue to improve.

One of the main goals of the Turning Points design is to raise the level of discourse among teachers by helping them exchange ideas about student learning, instructional methods, and curriculum development. By using the strategies presented in this guide and in *The Turning Points Guide to Looking at Student and Teacher Work*, teachers can engage in rigorous intellectual dialogue that will help them reflect on their work. Conversations with colleagues energize teachers and help them to learn from each other, often leading them

This guide does not dictate how teachers should develop curriculum, but proposes the principles underlying curriculum development in Turning Points schools.

to try new methods in the classroom. These conversations also draw teachers' attention to issues of equity as they focus on the diverse instructional needs of all students.

Five Principles of Turning Points Curriculum Development

1

Curriculum should be grounded in an understanding of the middle school child. Curriculum development and teaching methods are based on an understanding of the middle school child as an intellectually capable, complex person who is responsive to challenge.

2

Curriculum should be based on what we want students to know and be able to do. All curriculum development, teaching, and assessment are tied to a broader definition of standards than the typical state standards, which tend to be content-focused. Turning Points curriculum includes habits of mind, skills development, and in-depth study. Turning Points schools go beyond state and local standards to define what students need to do to be thoughtful, caring, and valued members of the community.

3

Students and teachers should be engaged in authentic, intellectual work. All student work should have significance beyond the classroom. This work should be purposeful and rigorous, and it should develop skills and knowledge that will prepare students for high school and beyond. As a result, Turning Points curriculum is often project-based.

4

Assessment should demonstrate that students can do important work. A crucial part of curriculum planning is developing formal and informal assessments to understand what students know and what they are learning in relation to the learning goals.

5

A coherent curriculum should be developed across the entire school. Teachers and administrators use a process called “mapping” to build a well-articulated, coherent curriculum across the school.

In Turning Points schools, curriculum is based on learning goals that include content standards, skills, and habits of mind.

1

CURRICULUM SHOULD BE GROUNDED IN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD

Turning Points schools ensure their curriculum and teaching methods are based on an understanding of the middle school child as a complex person who is vulnerable as well as responsive to challenge. Students in this age group experience a wide range of physical, social, and intellectual development. While some students are approaching adult physical development and stature, others look as if they could still be in elementary school. Some students are able to sit still for long periods of time while others need to be more active. Socially, it is during the middle school years that students begin to perceive the larger world around them and question their place in that world, often becoming self-conscious and unsure of themselves. Many are beginning to come to terms with their ethnic and gender identities. Intellectually, middle school students are gradually moving from concrete to formal operations. They are making a transition from thinking logically about their own real-life experiences to reasoning about abstract concepts and ideas.

In response to the unique needs of their students, middle schools need to organize their instructional programs and adopt teaching and learning methods that are most effective with this age group.

Turning Points recognizes that middle school students:



Are capable of critical and complex thinking and develop these skills by using them



Are capable of responding with high achievement when challenged and engaged



Show variability in themselves and need variety in their day and in what is asked of them



Need increasing autonomy and responsibility as well opportunities to demonstrate that they can behave responsibly

Middle school students are capable of complex thinking and high achievement.

■
Have abundant energy and interest that should be tapped instead of squelched

■
Are willing to take risks if they believe they are in a safe and trusting environment

Placing the needs and capabilities of middle school students at the center of curriculum planning, teaching, and assessment makes student learning more active, engaging, and profound. Improvements of this magnitude will occur only if teachers work collaboratively to create learning opportunities based on these beliefs. For example, to develop higher-order thinking skills, teachers ask students to grapple with open-ended questions based on meaningful work and to synthesize information so they can support their opinions with evidence. Believing that young adolescents are capable of high achievement means teachers must raise their expectations for the quality of student work and build in the support necessary to help all students meet higher standards. In order to allow middle school students to demonstrate they can act responsibly, teachers must genuinely ask students to use good judgment by, for example, having them make public presentations and by giving them choices.

Giving students these opportunities may very well be a dramatic change for a middle school that has focused more on controlling the behavior of students than on letting them make decisions for themselves. In the vignette that follows, Ms. Harrison organizes class time, paying close attention to the social and educational needs of young adolescents. This type of active and varied learning environment creates significantly deeper learning experiences for a greater number of students.

Ms. Harrison embraces her students' abundant energy and need for variability. Instead of lecturing for a whole class period on environmental dangers in the home and having the students read about them as homework, she plans four different activities to help her students learn. In an extended class period, her students read an article silently for 15 minutes, brainstorm in small groups the benefits and potential dangers of chemicals for family members, and then work with partners to begin writing an advertisement to sell a product that contains toxic chemicals to families. She ends the class with a student-led discussion about what chemicals are

dangerous to families, based on what the students learned in class that day. In this single class period, students learn what a household toxin is while deepening their understanding of the balance between the benefits and dangers of chemicals in the home. At the same time, students are actively connecting their learning with life outside school. They also listen to others and develop respect for divergent viewpoints.

2

CURRICULUM IS BASED ON WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

In Turning Points schools, curriculum standards are more broadly defined than the content standards that most state governments have developed in the recent past. A Turning Points school uses state standards in discussions to define for itself what students need to learn in order to be thoughtful, caring, and valued members of the community. Instead of merely ensuring that students attain curriculum standards limited to content knowledge, Turning Points schools also provide opportunities for students to develop the habits of mind and thinking skills that will prepare them for a thoughtful and successful future.

As schools and districts create their own standards, Turning Points suggests that they include three types of *learning goals* for students: habits of mind, skills, and content standards. These goals are kept at the forefront of the school community for all to see and for students and staff to strive for. By focusing on more than just content standards, Turning Points teachers aim to teach students to become compassionate and caring individuals who can think critically, access and synthesize information, clearly communicate their ideas, and develop deep understanding.

3

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS SHOULD BE ENGAGED IN AUTHENTIC, INTELLECTUAL WORK

Turning Points asks a school to integrate curriculum development, teaching, and assessment. What the school has determined students should know and be able to do drives curriculum development, teaching, and assessment. In this way, the focus is on student learning and growth, not on how much material is “covered” in a year.

Turning Points broadens the definition of standards to include how students use their minds and how they act and interact with others.

Curriculum and instruction need to provide students with opportunities to engage in authentic, intellectual work that has significance beyond the classroom.

Curriculum and instruction need to provide students with opportunities to engage in authentic, intellectual work that has significance beyond the classroom. This means moving beyond textbook-based instruction toward project-based curriculum that incorporates a wide variety of instructional materials and strategies and promotes challenging, intellectual work that connects to the real lives of students.

Project-based instruction provides increased opportunities for students to engage in authentic, intellectual work and creates a shift in the teacher's role. Sometimes the teacher may be the facilitator who guides students in a discussion about their science experiments, while at other times the teacher may set up a project for students that includes gathering oral histories of senior citizens. In still another role, the teacher may model his or her own writing to begin teaching students how to write a poem. Teachers will use teaching techniques that ask students to participate actively in learning and in applying knowledge, skills, and habits of mind. For example, students would not only study outstanding published poetry, but they would also write their own poetry and publish it in magazines they create or in national periodicals for youth. In science, students will be expected to create their own hypotheses and test them through investigation and research.

Curriculum based on authentic, intellectual work:

- Is purposeful, rigorous, and related to the real world
- Focuses on developing complex and critical thinking skills
- Is project-based and active in nature, allowing students to use their energy and creativity to enhance their learning
- Balances depth and breadth of material
- Explores relationships and connections, and integrates information across disciplines
- Is based on a multiple-draft process where students receive feedback from teachers and others to improve their work

- Explicitly teaches literacy across all content areas
- Integrates themes, essential questions, and standards into the daily work of students
- Addresses the variety of student learning styles by using a wide range of methods
- Allows students and teachers to take on numerous roles
- Allows for reflection and self-assessment

4

ASSESSMENT DEMONSTRATES THAT STUDENTS CAN DO IMPORTANT WORK

A crucial part of planning engaging learning opportunities for students is developing formal and informal assessments to understand what students know and what they are learning in relation to the unit's learning goals. In the Turning Points model, assessment asks students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Teachers gather this evidence throughout a unit of study or period of time, and also in a final, culminating project or performance. Very early in the curriculum development process, Turning Points teachers think about assessment and how students will demonstrate that they have achieved the learning goals. Instead of waiting until the end of a unit of study to create a test or assign a project, teachers create assessment activities at the beginning because the assessments help determine what students will be doing as the unit progresses.

To accommodate the wide range of learners in their classrooms, teachers devise a variety of assessments that include projects, exhibitions, portfolios, and demonstrations. Such assessments ask students to explain, interpret, apply, analyze, synthesize, solve problems, and communicate information. Teachers also ask their students to demonstrate understanding of others and themselves as examples of how they have learned.

At the beginning of the curriculum development process, teachers create assessments that help determine what students will do as the unit progresses.

Making sure assessments are “transparent” gives students a clear understanding of what is expected of them in terms of the quality of their work and how their work will be evaluated. Teachers can use rubrics, develop assessment criteria with students, and display models of exemplary work to help students understand what is expected of them. Rather than just giving students a grade that tells them how they did in relation to each other or to an unidentified standard, teachers use assessments that give students specific feedback which will help them improve. Assessment tasks based on learning goals help students know what is important to learn and assist teachers in understanding how effective their teaching is.

Characteristics of Assessment

In the Turning Points model, assessment:

- Is transparent—students know the criteria, learning goals, and timing of assessment
- Drives curriculum planning and teaching—what students are asked to do depends on how they will be asked to demonstrate their learning
- Takes many forms including projects, exhibitions, portfolios, and demonstrations
- Helps students, teachers, and parents understand what a child knows and can do and allows them to understand what a child needs to do to improve
- Is ongoing, tied to the learning goals, and used to inform curriculum planning, teaching, and professional development

5**A COHERENT CURRICULUM SHOULD BE DEVELOPED ACROSS THE ENTIRE SCHOOL**

As teachers develop curriculum based on learning goals and guided by themes and essential questions, they create learning experiences that are more thoughtfully organized. But it is not enough to have many thoughtfully designed experiences if they have no connection or relationship to each other. The Turning Points school engages in a process called “mapping” that leads to a coherent curriculum within grade levels, between grade levels, and across the entire school.

If you follow middle school students around for a day, it’s easy to see how fragmented and incoherent their learning experiences can be. There are redundancies and omissions in learning because one teacher rarely knows what other teachers are doing. This fragmentation is due in part to the way curriculum has been developed over the years. Topics might be included because teachers want to teach a particular topic, they might be held over from an earlier curriculum, or in response to perceived student deficits.

In order to build curriculum across a school, the teachers and administrators use mapping, a process that involves asking these four questions:

1

What do we want our students to know and be able to do?

2

What are we currently teaching?

3

Where are the redundancies and the gaps between what we should be teaching and what we are teaching?

4

What will we do about the redundancies and gaps?

Curriculum mapping is a process that builds a coherent curriculum across the entire school.

MAPPING THE CURRICULUM

The following four questions guide schools to work collaboratively to create a coherent curriculum across the entire school.

Process

1. WHAT DO WE WANT OUR STUDENTS TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO?

This question moves a faculty past narrow content standards to consider what matters most in becoming a literate and useful person. Members of the school community work collaboratively to identify important learning goals for middle school students including content, skills, and habits of mind. Teams may use the school's vision statement to inform the mapping process as they take a look at what teachers are experts at, what they enjoy teaching, and what they are already teaching. They will also review public documents such as curriculum frameworks or standards.

2. WHAT ARE WE CURRENTLY TEACHING?

Through a process of listing out or "mapping" what each person teaches, the faculty begins to understand what is actually being taught in all classrooms, at all levels. This mapping is done by subject area and grade level. Mapping helps a school to understand the current status of its curriculum.

3. WHERE ARE THE REDUNDANCIES AND THE GAPS BETWEEN WHAT WE SHOULD BE TEACHING, AND WHAT WE ARE TEACHING?

Once teachers have determined what they want to teach, what they should be teaching, and what they are teaching, they compare the lists to identify any overlaps and gaps. There may be unnecessary redundancies, as well as omissions of consequence.

4. WHAT WILL WE DO ABOUT THESE REDUNDANCIES AND GAPS?

Teachers choose priorities and make decisions on what to base the coherence of the curriculum. For example, curriculum might be organized around content areas, as teachers look closely at what everyone teaches throughout the year. Or, themes can be the guiding force behind coordination of curriculum. Some schools build coherence by focusing on a few essential questions that define what is taught. Habits of mind developed by the school may also help coordinate curriculum throughout the school. Once a coordinating lens is chosen, teachers use it to look closely at what is taught and compare it to what they think should be taught. In this analysis teachers fill the gaps and eliminate the redundancies. The whole faculty examines, subject by subject, what topics, themes, and learning goals will be addressed, when, and where. The result is a map, by grade level and discipline, of what is taught in the school.



Turning Points Curriculum Planning

This section of the Curriculum Guide is designed to help teachers understand the components of planning curriculum in the Turning Points model. It begins with a brief description of each component, followed by a more detailed explanation of the components, how teachers use them, and guidelines on what to consider when creating curriculum.

This section also includes a Curriculum Planning Template that will aid teachers in planning units of study in the Turning Points model. The template is designed to help teachers ask the questions that lead them to developing meaningful learning experiences for their students. Based on broad themes, these learning experiences use essential questions and a variety of instructional and assessment techniques to drive deep inquiry. This section closes with a completed template for a unit developed by a Turning Points teacher.

All the curriculum planning materials that follow are meant to be flexible tools. They may be used to help a single teacher develop a unit for one subject, or an academic team build an interdisciplinary unit around a common theme. In our work with schools, Turning Points has found that when teachers are first developing units according to this model, they benefit from a structure that guides them through the planning process. As teachers become more familiar with each component, they will be able to begin planning with any component and build units that intertwine all components.

Components of Turning Points Curriculum Planning

Theme: The theme is the concept or big idea that the study is centered around. It should be a concept that is important to humanity and can be explored across disciplines, eras, and cultures. For example, power, force, patterns, and freedom are all appropriate themes.

Essential Questions: These questions help focus students on the most important aspects of the theme. Teachers and students consider two or three substantive questions throughout the unit and look at them from multiple perspectives.

Learning Goals: These goals describe what students should learn and be able to do as a result of the unit of study. Learning Goals are divided into three areas: habits of mind, skills, and content standards.

Habits of mind — The ways of thinking and being that the school values

Skills — What students will be able to do by the end of the unit

Content Standards — The knowledge that students will acquire during the unit

Assessment: Divided into Culminating Assessment, Ongoing Assessments, and Reflection, assessment is designed so that students and teachers know how they are doing and what they have to do to improve.

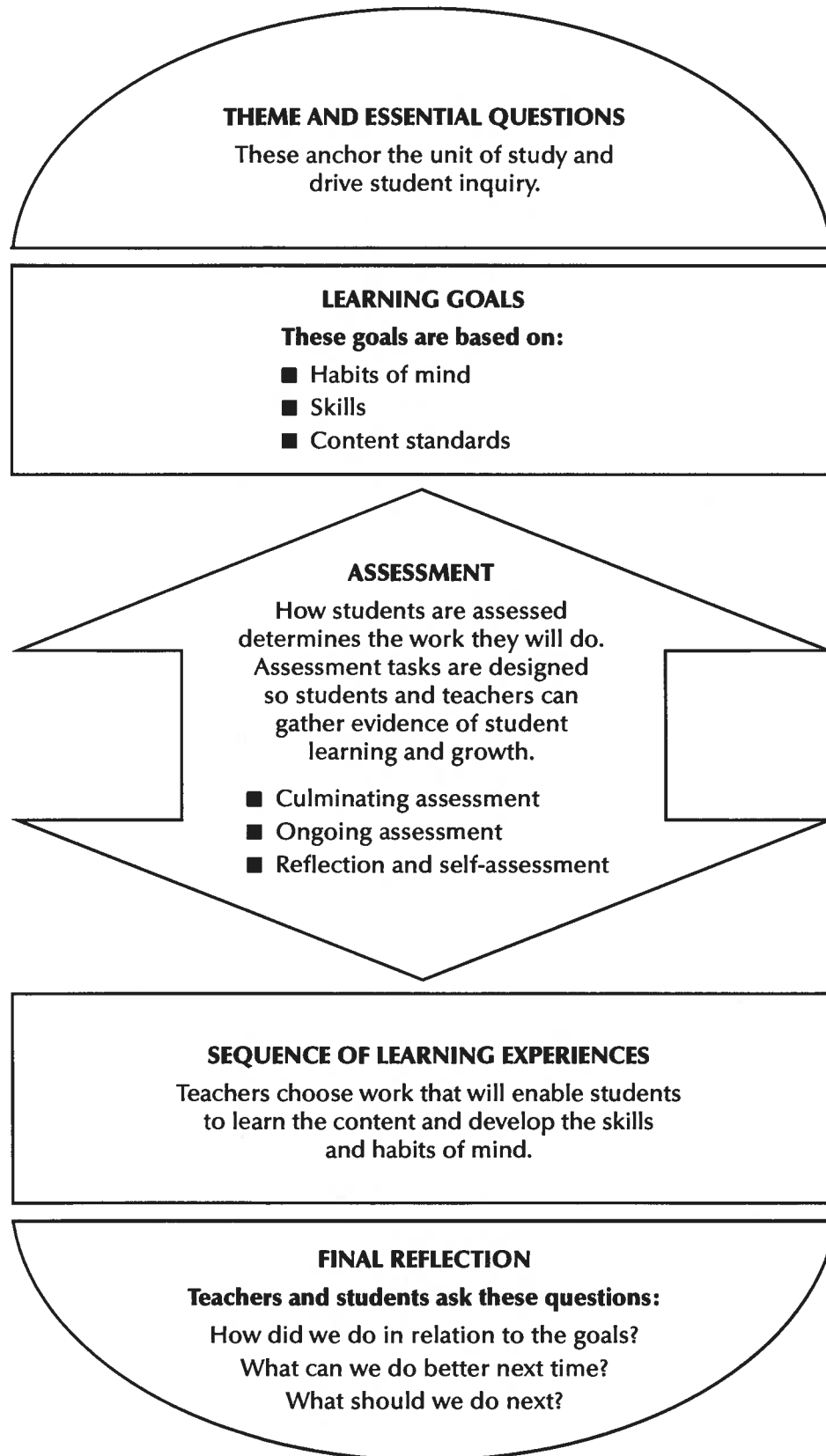
Ongoing Assessments — The work and assignments that show how students are doing as the unit progresses

Culminating Assessment — A project or performance that asks students to apply the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind they develop throughout the unit. All the work and learning of the unit build toward the creation of the culminating assessment.

Reflection and Self-assessment — Occurs throughout the unit as a part of ongoing assessment and at the end of the unit when students and teachers look back on the unit to see what worked well and what can be improved.

Selection and Sequence of Learning Experiences: These are the ways in which students engage with the content, learn the skills, and develop the habits of mind that are the goals of the unit. The sequence of activities should be designed to move students toward achieving the learning goals and creating the culminating assessment.

Turning Points Model for Curriculum Planning



THEME

A theme is not an individual topic that students study; it is a broad concept that is important to humanity and can be explored across disciplines, eras, cultures, and through many modes of experience. It serves as the organizing center of the unit, the concept that ties all work together. Themes focus a curriculum on the structures, relationships, and cycles that make up the world around us. When teachers organize a study around a theme, they create learning experiences that allow students to engage in the higher-order thinking skills that require them to access, analyze, synthesize, and communicate information.

As the organizing center of a unit, the theme provides natural links among disciplines.

Themes address a more complex definition of our world, one that studying discrete events or content does not allow. Students who study a curriculum based on a provocative theme begin to connect knowledge across time, discipline, and geography. Although theme-based units do not have to be interdisciplinary, when connections between disciplines become more transparent, students begin to link what they are studying to what they already know. When working in a theme-based study, students learn to develop a greater understanding of the world around them rather than learning in order to know more facts or do well on a test.

The most important facet of a theme is its ability to bridge disciplines and allow students to study the connections. For example a seventh grade team doing a half-year study on the theme of *Change: Cycles and Transformation* could consider how change is reflected in each discipline. In science, students could investigate adaptation, evolution, and the growth cycle. In social studies, students could study the political, economic, and sociological issues that drive the development of nations. In math, students might analyze data from the science or social studies classes to see how statistics and graphs can be manipulated to support or defeat change. In English, reading coming-of-age novels from around the world could lead students to write biographies of a diverse group of local community members.

Choosing a Theme

Themes:

- Support a wide-ranging study
- Engage students by being tied to their interests and concerns
- Are compelling enough to be explored in depth
- Can be explored from many disciplines
- Bridge time, geography, and cultures

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Essential questions are the overarching questions that help to focus a theme-based unit and prompt students to dig for deeper meaning. Growing out of the theme, essential questions deal with the concepts that are at the center of the field of study. They are not easily answered with facts and figures, but instead lead to other questions that will engage students and deepen their inquiry.

Curriculum and assessment are centered on the content and skills students need to address the essential questions effectively. In a unit on *Change: Cycles and Transformation*, possible essential questions are:

What forces drive change?

What makes you change?

How has technology affected change in different societies?

To consider the essential question *How has technology affected change in different societies?* students need to understand the concepts of technology and development. They must have knowledge about a range of societies across time and how and why they developed. Students must be able to synthesize this information and communicate it in a form that demonstrates they can develop hypotheses and support them with evidence. Thus, the teacher, using essential questions, creates experiences to ensure that all students learn the necessary content and develop skills needed to address questions thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Include students in framing or rewording essential questions as a way to encourage inquiry.

From the outset, essential questions should be shared or developed with students. Including students in framing or rewording essential questions will help them take ownership of their inquiry.

Characteristics of Essential Questions

Essential questions share certain characteristics that allow them to engage students and push them to think more deeply.

Essential questions:

- Are open-ended and may not have an obvious right or wrong answer
- Prompt students to make connections between ideas and/or disciplines
- Challenge students to see from and understand different perspectives, make discoveries, and analyze new evidence
- Are provocative and engaging
- Are asked again and again as students' understanding, knowledge, and skills develop and deepen
- Are modeled after the questions that practitioners in a field ask as they engage in their work
- Frame the information that students will explore during the unit of study

LEARNING GOALS

The learning goals of a unit are based on a broad definition of standards that includes what students should know, how they should act, and how they should interact with each other. When developing a unit of study, teachers select specific content standards, skills, and habits of mind that will serve as learning goals for that study.

Habits of mind – The ways of thinking and being that Turning Points schools help all students acquire. They are lenses through which students see the world. Habits of mind help guide a person’s thinking, actions, and interactions. For example, when looking at an historical event one habit of mind might be to use multiple perspectives and ask, *Whose viewpoint is represented here?* Another habit of mind could be to use evidence by asking, *What evidence do I need to support my position?* Habits of mind assist students in all content areas and help them become life-long learners. Habits of mind can be adopted school wide or created by teachers individually.

Skills – What students will be able to do by the end of a unit or study.

Content Standards – The knowledge that is important for students to learn during a unit of study.

Teachers’ choices of learning goals are based on student needs and interest, teacher knowledge, and the theme or content being studied. Teachers should decide on a limited number of learning goals that develop a variety of learning styles and skills.

From the beginning, learning goals should be shared or even developed with students. If they know what they are striving for, students are better able to assess their own progress and achieve the learning goals. Teachers should choose activities and instructional methods based on how well they will move students toward successfully meeting the identified standards, skills, and habits of mind.

Make learning goals explicit to students at the beginning of the unit so they can know what they are striving for.

Characteristics of Learning Goals

Learning goals:

- Are linked to district and state standards
- Incorporate skills, content, standards, and habits of mind
- Are challenging but achievable
- Are explicit and understood by all students
- Are used by students while they are doing the work of the unit
- Are used by teachers while they are designing assessment tasks, projects, and the work of the unit
- Are connected to the everyday life of students

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING GOALS		
Content Standards <i>What students should know</i>	Skills <i>What students should be able to do</i>	Habits of mind <i>The ways of thinking and being that a school values</i>
<p>What a fraction is</p> <p>The properties of matter</p> <p>The major events leading up to and during the American Revolution</p> <p>Story elements including plot, theme, point of view, and climax</p>	<p>Gather evidence by using different types of historical sources</p> <p>Write an original story that demonstrates understanding of plot, theme, point of view, and climax</p> <p>Use computation of fractions to solve problems</p> <p>Devise an experiment specifying variables to be changed or controlled</p>	<p>Persistence: Using a variety of methods before finding a correct solution</p> <p>The ability to use evidence to evaluate sources of information</p> <p>The ability to view an event from multiple perspectives</p> <p>Ownership: What is my role and responsibility?</p>

ASSESSMENT

Assessment connects curriculum, instruction, and learning and enables teachers and students to measure how well they are doing in attaining learning goals. In a Turning Points school, students know the criteria by which they are being measured. Expectations for learning are clear and are often developed with the students. In this model, teachers think about assessment in three ways—culminating assessment, ongoing assessment, and reflection and self-assessment.

Culminating Assessment

Because they know where they want to end up—with all students attaining the learning goals—Turning Points teachers plan backwards by starting with the culminating assessment and working their way to the beginning of the unit or course. A culminating assessment is a project or performance that ties together all of the learning goals and work that the students will do over the course of the unit. All work that students do leads to the culminating assessment which should display the depth and breadth of their learning. In the final project, students apply the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind set forth in the learning goals of the unit. As students assess their growth from the beginning of a study to this final work, they should understand and be able to communicate where they perform best, what they have learned, and how they need to improve.

A high-quality culminating project or performance engages students in work that has relevance outside of school. This work should reflect how adults use the skills and knowledge in the real world. The skills students learn in areas such as music, history, and mathematics are modeled on the real-life work of adults in professional, trade, and service occupations. In order to use the work of practitioners as a guide in curriculum development, consider the following questions:

What do people working in this field do?

How do people develop these skills in daily life outside of school?

What are the questions people in this field try to answer?

What processes do people use who are working in or studying this discipline?

A culminating assessment ties together all of the learning goals and work that students do over the course of a unit.

These questions lead teachers to develop projects and activities that have relevance beyond the classroom. For example, instead of creating posters that list the properties of solids, gases, and liquids, seventh grade students studying physical science could create exhibits that actually demonstrate substances changing form and how different properties make substances well-suited for specific purposes.

Considering student interests and needs and looking outside of the school leads teachers in a significantly different direction than in the past. Teachers design learning experiences around research, discussion, inquiries, role-plays, and other active methods. Instead of using strategies based on review and rote learning, teachers engage students in work that is participatory and has meaning beyond the classroom.

Culminating projects or performances:

- Allow students to use a variety of literacy and thinking skills
- Are based on learning goals and lead students towards attaining them
- Give students opportunities to demonstrate their attainment of the learning goals
- Encourage students to become self-directed thinkers and learners
- Have a structure that is clear to the students, teachers and others
- Engage students by being connected to the problems and questions experts and professionals deal with outside of school
- Are measurable in a variety of ways such as using rubrics or assessment criteria in community panels and peer reviews

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE CULMINATING PROJECTS OR PERFORMANCES

- Producing a report on the town's water use and water quality that is distributed to the town government and its citizens
- Creating a guide for new parents that can be distributed through local health centers
- Creating a plan, budget, and proposal for redesigning the town center that would incorporate the town's history and be presented to the town council, chamber of commerce, and citizen groups
- Hosting a town-wide celebration that demonstrates students' language skills and understanding of the history behind Cinco de mayo, and the role of Mexican culture in the community
- Teaming with local university students to investigate small motors and mechanical advantage, and build and present machines to engineers in the community
- Developing a web page about the school that includes samples of student work, school history, and links to other useful sites

Ongoing Assessment

The actual work students engage in throughout a unit of study that leads them to the culminating project or performance comprises the ongoing assessments. Ongoing assessments are not separate assessment activities; they are the student work of the unit. Essentially, any work students do prior to the end of a unit of study can be used to obtain a picture of what each student understands. Ongoing assessment takes many forms and involves students individually, students helping each other, teachers working with students, and teachers working with other teachers. At the beginning of a unit or while planning a unit, teachers assess what their students know and need to learn. During a unit, teachers and students assess how well students are doing in progressing toward their goals. At the end of the study, both groups assess what has been learned and what still needs work.

Ongoing Assessment includes opportunities for students to:



Use the learning goals to assess their learning and growth



Use models of excellent work to help them understand the expectations of quality



Reflect on their work to understand how they learn best



Analyze and give constructive feedback on other students' work



Use rubrics and other tools that make the expectations of each assignment clear to all students

EXAMPLES OF ONGOING ASSESSMENTS INCLUDE:

Student Tasks

- Student reflection on work
- Problem sets that allow students to explain their work
- Writing prompts
- Journal writing
- Peer Conferences
- Whole-class critique of one student's work
- Role plays and skits
- Storyboards
- Artwork
- Multimedia presentations
- Socratic Seminars
- Quizzes
- Drafts of work

Teacher Tools

- Written feedback from teacher to student
- Rubrics/Assessment criteria
- Teacher conferences with students
- Teacher observations of individual or group work

Reflection and Self-Assessment

A culture of ongoing assessment in a classroom or school includes many components such as peer conferencing, self-assessment, the use of rubrics or assessment criteria, revision, group critique, and portfolios. A central piece of this culture is student reflection and self-assessment. The goal of reflection and self-assessment is for students to understand how they learn best and to look critically at their work so they can improve it. The kind of reflection that helps students improve their work on a specific assignment includes peer conferences, written comments from teachers, and whole-class critique sessions.

The final reflection allows students to identify what they have learned and how they learn best.

Reflection also happens at the end of a unit and gives students and teachers a chance to see what worked and what didn't work during the study. During a final reflection, students can think back over a unit to better understand what teaching techniques worked best for them. Teachers can solicit input from students and collaborating teachers to learn what the most effective pieces of the study were.

The final reflection usually happens in response to questions the teacher asks. Simple questions, such as the following, often elicit the most thoughtful responses from students:

What have you learned?

What assignment helped you learn the most?

At what point during the unit did you work the hardest and why do you think you worked so hard then?

What do you wish you did differently in this unit and how can you make sure you do this in the future?

By including a final reflection, teachers create the opportunity to improve their work and the work of students and to apply this improvement in the next unit.

SELECTION AND SEQUENCE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Creating learning goals and deciding on a culminating assessment at the beginning of the curriculum planning process helps teachers select the most effective learning experiences and sequence for the unit of study. Focusing on what it takes to successfully complete the project or performance allows teachers to determine what is essential to reaching the learning goals.

In order to determine which learning experiences, tasks, and activities are most appropriate, teachers ask a series of questions:



What tasks will students need to actually do to reach the learning goals and create the culminating assessment?



What knowledge do students need to begin to engage with the material?



What skills will students need to develop so they can achieve the learning goals and create the culminating assessment? (skills that have to do with learning and skills that have to do with working together)



Does each learning experience, task, or activity help students attain the learning goals or create the culminating assessment?



What type of project would allow students to engage in authentic, intellectual work that has significance beyond the classroom?

The progression of a unit or a study should be thoughtfully planned, designed to actively engage students in authentic, intellectual work that builds toward the culminating project. While determining the sequence of the unit or study Turning Points teachers consider:



The beginning of the unit should spark student interest in the theme and essential questions.



The learning goals should be clear to the students from the beginning of the unit (including discussion of goals, students re-writing the goals in their own language, developing goals with students, students deciding what evidence would show attainment of the learning goals.)

Focusing on what it takes to achieve the project or performance allows teachers to determine what is essential to reaching the learning goals.

■ Determine what students already know and can do in relation to the learning goals.

■ The standards of quality and expectations for what students should do for each activity should be clear (including the use of models, rubrics, assessment criteria, project timelines, lists of assignment requirements).

■ Major deadlines for work and the culminating assessment should be shared or developed with students at the beginning of the unit.

■ Experiences that teach skills, habits of mind, and content standards should be organized so they build on one another and lead to the culminating performance or project.

■ Instructional and learning methods should be varied. Give students opportunities to make decisions and choices about their learning and the work they will do.

■ Include checkpoints during the study when student progress toward the learning goals can be gauged.



Curriculum Planning Template

This section offers the following worksheets that you can use as you plan your curriculum according to the Turning Points model.

- Theme, Essential Questions, and Learning Goals
- Culminating Performance or Project
- Ongoing Assessments
- Sequence of Learning Experiences
- The Final Reflection

THEME, ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS, AND LEARNING GOALS

THE ANCHORS OF CURRICULUM: THEME AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What theme will students investigate?

What two or three Essential Questions will guide student inquiry?

THE LEARNING GOALS

Habits of mind: What ways of thinking and acting will students develop?

Skills: What will students be able to do as a result of this study?

Content standards: What will students know by the end of this study?

CREATING A CULMINATING PERFORMANCE OR PROJECT

1. Brainstorm how people outside of school use the habits of mind, skills, and content that students will be learning.
2. Select one or more of the ideas you thought of and shape them into a culminating project or performance that students could do.
3. Check to see if this project will ask students to apply the Habits of Minds and the Skill Goals of the unit.
4. Check to see if this project will ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the Content Goals.
5. What opportunities will there be for students to do original work or construct knowledge?
6. In front of what public audiences will students demonstrate their learning?
7. What value does this project have beyond the assignment?

Based on the process above, describe the Culminating Project or Performance that will allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the Learning Goals.

ONGOING ASSESSMENTS

Below is a process you can use for creating the ongoing assessments of the unit.

1. List what you would see or hear from students if they were using the Habits of Mind and applying the Skill Goals of this unit.
2. Figure out how students could do the things you listed in #1.
3. List how students will demonstrate that they have learned the Content Goals of the unit.
4. Figure out how your students will do the work you listed in #3.
5. Make sure there are opportunities for students to reflect on the quality of their work and how they are learning.
6. Make sure there are opportunities for students to give and receive feedback on each others' work.
7. Make sure there are opportunities for you to give regular feedback to students that will help them improve their work during the unit.

Evidence of Learning and Growth: What evidence will students need to demonstrate that they are attaining the different Learning Goals as you proceed through the unit?

Habits of mind:

Skills:

Content standards:

SELECTION OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

List the learning experiences that students could engage in to develop the habits of mind and use the skills and content of this unit.

SELECTION: Apply the following questions to each experience you listed above to help you decide which ones will be most useful in helping the students attain the learning goals.

1. How does this activity help students deepen their understanding of the Essential Questions?
2. Which Learning Goals does this activity help students attain?
3. How does this activity allow students to develop new ideas or better understanding?
4. How does this activity help you assess what students have learned or are learning?
5. How does this activity stimulate the curiosity of students and engage them?
6. In what ways does this activity prompt students to reflect on their work and the world around them?

SEQUENCE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Order the learning experiences you have selected to show the progression of the unit toward a culminating project. Map out a rough sequence including major deadlines and important checkpoints of student understanding and skill development. Consider the following guidelines:

1. The beginning of the unit should spark student interest in the theme and essential questions.
2. The learning goals should be clear to the students from the beginning of the unit (including discussion of goals, students re-writing the goals in their own language, developing goals with students, students deciding what evidence would show attainment of the learning goals.)
3. Determine what students already know and can do in relation to the learning goals.
4. The standards of quality and expectations for what students should do for each activity should be clear (including the use of models, rubrics, assessment criteria, project timelines, lists of assignment requirements).
5. Experiences that teach skills, habits of mind, and content standards should be organized so they build on one another and lead to the culminating performance or project.
6. Instructional and learning methods should be varied. Give students opportunities to make decisions and choices about their learning and the work they will do.
7. Include checkpoints during the study when student progress toward the learning goals can be gauged.

Considering student needs and interests

1. a. How will the work be organized and structured so students know what they have to do?
b. What opportunities will students have for making decisions and choices about their learning?
2. How will students know the standards of quality for the work they do?
3. How will all students receive the support needed for achieving the learning goals?

THE FINAL REFLECTION

STUDENT REFLECTION

What questions will you ask students so they can reflect on their work, what they learned, and how they learn best?

Examples include:

What have you learned?

What assignment helped you learn the most?

At what point during the unit did you work the hardest and why do you think you worked so hard then?

What do you wish you did differently in this unit and how can you make sure you do this in the future?

THE FINAL REFLECTION (CONTINUED)

TEACHER REFLECTION

What worked well in planning this unit?

What did students respond to most favorably?

How would you do things differently when you teach this unit again?

What did you learn from creating and teaching this unit that you can apply to the next unit?



A Turning Points Curriculum Unit

The completed unit plan that follows was created by Sharon A. Dunn of the Winthrop (Mass) Middle School and Donald Dayton of Winthrop High School for a unit on *Heroes*. The plan is included as an example of what two teachers created when working collaboratively with colleagues and a coach.

THEME, ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS, AND LEARNING GOALS

THE ANCHORS OF CURRICULUM: THEME AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What theme will this study investigate?

Heroes

What two or three Essential Questions will guide the students' inquiry?

1. Why do we study heroes?
2. What is the role/function of a hero?
3. Who will be the heroes of the future?

THE LEARNING GOALS

Habits of Mind: How will this study affect the way students act and think?

1. Evidence: How do we know this? What is the proof?
2. Perspective: Whose viewpoint is this? Is this a reliable source?
3. Supposition: What are the alternatives? What if something different happened?
4. Open-mindedness: Have I considered other viewpoints?
Have I considered conflicting evidence?
Does the evidence support my original conclusion?

Skills: What will students be able to do as a result of this study?

Students will:

1. Define a literary concept and develop it with examples
2. Compare and contrast literary characters
3. Research and organize information
4. Use evidence to support a main idea/theme statement
5. Develop and deliver an oral presentation

Content Standards: What will students know by the end of this study?

Students will know that:

1. A hero embodies the values of the society
2. The theme of "hero" is universal through all times, culture, and eras
3. A hero may be a tragic or an absurd figure
4. The hero's role or function varies in different times, cultures, and circumstances

CULMINATING PROJECT

Describe the Culminating Project or Performance that will allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the Learning Goals.

- Students will have the following two options for a culminating project. (They can choose to work with a partner, but each student will have to develop their own presentation on a hero of their choice).
- Select a figure to be “The Hero of the Twentieth Century” from real life or literature. Defend your choice. Identify the heroic qualities of your choice. Research and present evidence that your choice is reasonable.
- Project into the future and create “The Hero of the Twenty-First Century.” Defend your choice. Identify the heroic qualities of your choice. Research and describe how the hero has functioned in past and present societies. Predict the needs of society in the future and how the hero will act to fill those needs.
- All culminating projects require a written, an oral, and a visual component.

PROJECT FORMAT OPTIONS INCLUDE:

1. Compose a ballad or narrative poem to be performed for the audience. Design and create appropriate stage scenery.
2. Design and create a painting, mural, collage, or montage. Explain orally and in writing your choice of material, methods of creation, plan of organization, and symbolism.
3. Create and perform a dramatic skit with props and costumes. Submit the written script, complete with stage directions.
4. Create a job resume and portfolio for your hero. Work with your partner to present your hero on a job interview. You should dress as your hero and present the key elements of the portfolio during the interview.

ONGOING ASSESSMENTS

- Teacher observations of group work/discussions
- Student/teacher conferences on
 - Process summaries or reflections
 - Written commitment to project option
 - Initial draft of written component
 - Project timeline and student checklist of progress in research, organization, etc
- Learning Journals (daily log of progress, left in classroom for teacher to review)
- Graphic organizers showing evidence of research
- Peer conferences—within group and among groups
- Quizzes on readings
- Written answers to questions on readings

INQUIRY PROMPTS

Students will be given an inquiry prompt each day to respond to. They will write their thoughts in their Learning Journals.

- To be a hero, must one:
 - make a sacrifice? face danger?
 - be a role model? change the world?
 - take risks? become famous?
- Who have been the heroes of
 - history? literature? medicine? business/industry?
 - science? math? technology? the military?
 - sports? religion? politics?
- What could be the value of studying heroes? What can we learn from studying heroes?
- Does a society need heroes? Why do we create heroes?
- If one role of the hero in society is to be a role model, what do our heroes tell us about gender roles?
- What examples of heroes do we find in films? television? video games? What are the qualities of these heroes?
- Who was the last real hero? Are sports heroes really heroes?
- What examples of heroes can we find in the eastern hemisphere?
- Are there qualities which seem to be universal across time and culture, even into the future? If so, what are they?
- What will our world be like in fifty years? What kind of hero will be needed for that world?

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

List the learning experiences that students could do to develop the habits of mind and use the skills and content of this unit.

- Overview of the assignment: the theme, essential questions, the learning goals, and the project options
- Initial assessment of what students already know: Small group brainstorming of definition of “hero” and list of possible heroes; reporting the full class; categorizing of heroes; extraction of qualities
- Inquiry prompts: used as basis for brainstorming, class discussion, or composition writing
- Write analysis of the concept of the “hero”, including definition, characteristics, and examples
- Read selected literary works
- Compare and contrast at least three literary heroes from different historical eras or from literary selections read this year (novels, short stories, biographies)
- Brainstorm the circumstances that tend to give rise to heroes
- Make a poster or graphic organizer to illustrate several ways in which society rewards or punishes its heroes.
- Mildred Taylor wrote *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* because she felt there were no African American heroes in the books she read when she was in school. Choose another category/group of people that is under-represented in books you have read for school. What conclusions do you draw from this? Explain who should be added to the heroes learned about in school. Write a composition addressing these issues.

COMMITMENT TO PROJECT OPTION

It is my intention to submit the culminating project in the format checked off below:

- Compose a ballad or narrative poem to be performed for the audience. Design and create appropriate stage scenery.
- Design and create a painting, mural, collage, or montage. Explain orally and in writing your choice of material, methods of creation, plan of organization, and symbolism.
- Create and perform a dramatic skit with props and costumes. Submit the written script, complete with stage directions.
- Create a job resume and portfolio for your hero. Work with your partner to present your hero on a job interview. You should dress as your hero and present the key elements of the portfolio during the interview.

I will be working with: _____

PROJECT TIMELINE

ACTIVITY	DATE DUE	DATE COMPLETED
Selection of Hero		
Research		
Conference with Teacher		
Graphic organizer of research		
List of heroic qualities		
Written commitment to project option		
Conference with teacher		
First draft of written component		
Conference with peers		
Visual component		
Final written component		
Plan for oral component		
Conference with teacher		
Presentation		

THE FINAL REFLECTION

STUDENT REFLECTION

As part of the written component of the culminating project:

1. Explain your choice of materials
2. Explain the meaning of any symbolism used
3. Analyze the process you followed
4. Explain why you organized your project the way you did
5. Explain the unifying theme of your presentation
6. Explain how your understanding of the concept of the hero has changed as a result of this unit.

For the final reflection on their learning in this unit each student will answer the following questions in their Learning Journals:

1. What activity did you find the most interesting?
2. What did you do during this unit that helped you learn the most about heroes?
3. At what point during this unit did you work the hardest and why do you think you worked so hard then?
4. What do you wish you did differently while studying heroes, and how can you make sure you do this in the future?

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Cover and interior design: Carroll Conquest, Conquest Design

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