

# THE CLASSROOM

## LESSON PLANS

With increased pressure being put on school systems to meet standards and higher levels of student achievement, the teacher shoulders the daily burden of deciding how to teach more content more effectively in the same amount of time or less. The blueprint for achieving this daunting challenge is the lesson plan. How are lessons planned and developed?

### How Do Teachers Determine *What* to Teach?

Ohio math and science teachers were asked to specify the dominant influences on what they choose to teach:<sup>1</sup>

- At elementary and middle school levels, about 60 percent cited district curriculum guides and the Ohio proficiency test frameworks.
- At the elementary level, the Ohio Department of Instruction's model curricula are influential for another 20 to 30 percent.
- In high schools, school curriculum guides are important, as are national standards, together accounting for another 20 to 30 percent.

Despite this guidance, Ohio teachers, like those in the rest of the U.S., teach many topics each year—about 10 more per year than the international average. Further, there is little agreement on which topics to teach or the amount of emphasis to give them.<sup>2</sup>

- Most Ohio teachers spend less than 5 lessons on any one subject topic in math and science.
- While Ohio's schools' curricula expect teachers to cover somewhat fewer topics in elementary school than is true across the U.S., from eighth grade through high school, some 30 topics are expected to be taught each year in Ohio, markedly more than in U.S. high schools typically.

### How Do Teachers Determine *How* to Teach?

- Teacher editions of textbooks dominate the choice of teaching methods in Ohio's math classes. They were named as the primary source by 40 to 55 percent of the teachers.<sup>3</sup>
- Twenty to thirty percent of the math teachers said they used resources other than textbooks and school, district, state, or national curricular guides.
- In science, 30 to 40 percent chose other resources, while 20 to 35 percent said textbooks.

Implementing and integrating learning tasks in the classroom, classwork, homework, materials, and technology begins with the lesson plan. With so many options available to the teacher and a limited time in which to use them, devising an effective, engaging lesson plan is critical.

An efficient and productive lesson plan should be based on two fundamental perspectives on learning:<sup>4</sup>

1. *Learner-centered instruction* begins with and builds on the knowledge and experience students bring to the classroom. This includes cultural practices and beliefs, as well as knowledge of academic content.
2. *Knowledge-centered instruction* provides students not only with knowledge and skills, but with the ability to apply them to solve problems.

Both perspectives should influence and permeate the design of a lesson plan. A lesson plan that emphasizes an excessively broad range of subjects runs the risk of developing knowledge of disconnected sets of facts and skills. Much more preferable is a lesson plan that helps students make connections within a discipline so that they “know their way around in it” without losing sight of where they are.<sup>5</sup>

## Endnotes

1. NCREL analysis of OMSC-sponsored Teacher Survey, Fall 1999.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. J. Bransford, A. Brown, and R. Cocking, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC, 1999.
5. Ibid.



Copyright © 2000 by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Copying is permitted for educational purposes.

This work was produced in whole or in part with funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Eisenhower grant number R168R50003. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.