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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the challenges and difficulties of adopting new "authentic" methods of instruction that help students not only learn but also develop habits that enable them to use their knowledge more effectively. "Authentic" methods of instruction are defined as those that require students to produce (not just reproduce) knowledge relevant to their lives through disciplined inquiry, and to achieve in ways that are of value to themselves and to society. A challenge to implementing authentic instruction is daily time constraints. Traditional school-day structure, with six or seven 45-minute periods, allows students to have a broad range of experiences but does not allow them to examine any single aspect of the curriculum in much depth. Ways for teachers to achieve authentic instruction within the traditional schedule are suggested, providing extra "quality" time with students rather than more actual time by reprioritizing curricula and methods to study fewer topics but in greater depth. While such restructuring may be difficult for teachers, the results decentralize the classroom and encourage a more challenging and collaborative environment for students to learn how to use knowledge not merely possess it. Traditional and authentic methods are contrasted in a short unit in U.S. History, and authentic lessons in other disciplines are suggested. Traditional methods should not be totally abandoned, but they must become secondary to more authentic ones if teachers are to engage students in work that is valuable in realistic settings, to raise the expectations of students, and to challenge them to think more deeply than they traditionally have in school. (ND)

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## Gateways to experience

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# Making Time for Authentic Teaching and Learning

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"Authentic" methods of instruction are defined as those that require students (1) to produce (not just *reproduce*) knowledge relevant to their lives through *disciplined inquiry* and (2) to achieve in ways that are of value to them and society (Newmann 1991). Through these methods, it is hoped that students not only learn but begin to develop habits that enable them to know how to use their knowledge, both acquired and not yet acquired, to solve future problems, as well.

Wiggins (1993, 206) defined authentic tasks as "engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively" and that resemble the "real-life tests of adult life." Burke (1993) listed examples of such assignments, which may be used to challenge students to examine curricular topics in depth. These include letter-writing on real-life issues, group problem-solving sessions, designing and conducting surveys, writing historical newspapers, creating videos of panel discussions or debates, delivering speeches, and writing reflective journals about their own work. These types of assignments are desirable because, in addition to requiring students to understand basic facts, they help students develop and enhance communication, technical, interper-

sonal, organizational, problem-solving, and decision-making skills" (Burke 1993, 73) necessary for success in the information age of the 1990s and beyond.

For teachers who see the value of the recent research, authentic instruction could mean that their students would be able to participate in more meaningful discussions and simulations, to present their ideas and research to the class, and to work both independently of and with other students on projects that stimulate interest in the topic at hand. Wiggins (1992), Burke (1993), Shepard (1989), and others called for the use of such activities—not only for instruction but in assessment—to complement traditional paper-and-pencil tests so that the instruments really match the learning tasks. Without the time for authentic teaching and assessment, teachers must rely on one-dimensional measures to determine students' progress.

### Sustained Student Thought

The Coalition of Essential Schools and other groups promoting the restructuring of the traditional school realize that students' time is often fragmented and rushed (Sizer 1984). Six or seven 45-minute periods allow students to have a broad range of experiences, but, typically, none of them allow students to examine any single

aspect of the curriculum in much depth. Most teachers have had the bell interrupt good student thought, which was finally achieved in the 44th minute of class. Fortunately, to remedy this situation, many schools have devised longer "blocked" class periods that meet less frequently than normal: flexible, team-blocked class periods; and other alternatives that allow for sustained student activity and thought.

While this restructured schedule may seem desirable to innovative teachers, most junior high and high schools adhere to the traditional model. Schools are slow to change due to administrative reluctance to "rock the boat," teacher fears about changing lesson plans and formats, the power of the traditional master schedule, or community concerns about the motives behind changes in "tried and true" schooling. Therefore, if teachers are to achieve sustained student thought, they must find a way to do it.

### Time for a Change

Certainly, while teachers alone cannot provide the *actual* extra time that a restructured school day could, they can provide extra *quality* time with their students by reprioritizing their curricula and methods. Sizer (1984) maintained that teachers must

realize that "less is more." Studying a few topics in depth yields greater student interest and understanding than studying many topics superficially. Teachers must practice "selective abandonment" in pruning their curricula (Burke 1993).

This may be painful for those teachers who think that each part of the curriculum is equally important for the students—or at least to their performance on mandated standardized tests. Such curriculum-pruning is also difficult for new teachers because it means challenging, even disregarding, the curricular ideas established by veteran teachers. Yet, if teachers increase their use of authentic methods, more quality time with students can be gained even in 45-minute periods. Instructional methods that feature the teacher as the information-giver allow for little stimulating discussion, interaction, and research among students. Often, students in these classrooms neither speak nor are they directly spoken to. On the other hand, excellent learning can occur if the teacher decentralizes the classroom and encourages groups of students to solve problems and complete meaningful projects. In this cooperative scenario, following an initial challenge by the teacher, students challenge each other, and the teacher can informally address the concerns of each child or group of children during the course of the class period.

The process of adopting new methods may be difficult. It takes great effort and time to design assignments that effectively encourage students to delve beneath the surface of a topic and to understand it in a meaningful context. It is easier—and may seem more respon-

sible—for teachers to stress the "basics" through rote daily assignments. However, the knowledge of material is necessary before the more authentic, higher-level assignments can be tackled. Rote assignments must be embedded in instruction: they must not be the center of it. The result of student effort must be an understanding of how to use knowledge, not merely possess it.

### Practical Methods

What follows is an example of a short unit in United States history that deviates from traditional, rote social studies methods of lecture, reading, and fact recall. To meet the objective that students understand the social debates over divisive issues of women's rights, labor rights, and immigration in the late 1800s, a traditional teacher might assign text reading with comprehension questions, lectures, filmstrips, or videos, a list of vocabulary words to define, and a recall quiz or test. Through authentic instruction, students might participate in three model conventions, one for each of the three issues being examined, where each student is assigned a role, either as an advocate in the movement or as a defender of the status quo. The students then prepare persuasive speeches, conducting the necessary research on the authentic perspective of their characters and others and on the historical factors that influenced those perspectives.

Both of these methods teach about the social conditions of the time and the reactions of different groups to those conditions, but the authentic lesson puts the students at center stage and demands that they understand the issues at hand.

Speeches can be graded by using rubrics (Burke 1993, 67). The numbers from such scoring devices are easily converted into traditional letter grades.

Authentic lessons are also practical in other disciplines. At Hamilton Southeastern Junior High School in Fishers, Indiana, the seventh-grade science teachers have developed a problem-solving simulation that addresses the issue of solid waste management. Each seventh-grade student assumes the role of a citizen in a fictional community. Students encounter various perspectives and evaluate many alternatives to landfill construction. The city council members choose an alternative by weighing costs, environmental impact, practicality, and other considerations. Then, all students are required to write reactions to, and evaluations of, the process and outcome of the simulation. Math students might design and actually build a model of a home to demonstrate their understanding of measurement skills and the concept of scale. In English classes, students might assume the roles of authors of different genres and take part in a panel discussion about a current issue.

### New Methods, New Challenges

Challenges exist for veteran teachers breaking away from traditional methods and for beginning teachers designing challenging lessons and assessments for the first time. There is no magic formula, but almost any teacher—or team of teachers—is able to generate ideas for thought-provoking, authentic lessons. Teachers must realize that the ultimate result of schooling must be for students to

have the ability to transfer and apply their knowledge and skills to unforeseen situations in the future (Fogarty and McTighe 1993).

To create lessons that challenge students to develop the necessary thoughtfulness, teachers should consider the general strategies outlined by Dana and Tippins (1993) and Fogarty and McTighe (1993). Dana and Tippins (1993, 4) suggested allowing "students to demonstrate knowledge and skills that are worth knowing," "focusing on the 'big ideas' or concepts rather than trivial micro-facts or specialized skills," focusing "on the ability to produce a quality product of performance, rather than a single right answer," and creating contexts for work "which are rich, realistic and enticing—within the inevitable constraints of time and resources."

Fogarty and McTighe (1993) also outlined key principles to help educators become teachers of thinking. First, teachers must create conditions that encourage thoughtfulness by celebrating debate and differing points of view, offering students the opportunities to plan and to see the consequences of their activities, and designing

activities that demand experimentation. Second, teachers should employ cooperative learning strategies to foster the sharing of viewpoints and information. Third, teachers should encourage students to reflect on their own work in written journals or logs and to think aloud while demonstrating their understanding. These methods promote the students' ability to store their new knowledge and skills for longer periods of time so that they can be used later in life.

Traditional methods should not be totally abandoned; they developed over the years for practical reasons. However, if teachers wish to create more quality time with their students, these methods must be secondary to more authentic ones. Most teachers do not work in restructured schools that provide extensive time for sustained student thought and innovative class activities. Nevertheless, even without this extended time, teachers can assess students' authentic knowledge by reprioritizing their methods in the available class time. Authentic methods, such as those in the units outlined above, are necessary if teachers are to engage students in work that is valuable in

realistic settings, to raise the expectations of students, and to challenge them to think more deeply than they traditionally have in school. Only within this framework will students gain a meaningful understanding of issues and the skills necessary to succeed in the information age of the twenty-first century.

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