

Reflecting on Course Priorities: Asking “What’s Worth Understanding?”

When considering course priorities it may help to think about the elements of your course as fitting into one of the following three categories:

- ✓ Things worth “being familiar with” – this includes broad based knowledge – the things we want students to hear, read, view, research or otherwise encounter.
- ✓ Things “essential to know and do” – these are the essential elements of the knowledge (facts, concepts, principles, processes, strategies, methods etc).
- ✓ “Enduring Understandings” – these are the big ideas and important understandings we want students to dig into and retain well after they’ve forgotten many of the other facts or details. These sit at the heart of the course and should be reflected in the learning outcomes.

When considering what constitutes an ‘enduring understanding’ consider the following four guiding questions:

1. To what extent does the idea, topic or process represent a ‘big idea’ that has enduring value beyond the classroom?
2. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process reside at the heart of the discipline?
3. To what extent does the idea, topic or process require ‘uncovering’ (such as with abstract ideas, things that are not intuitive or that require the synthesis of complex ideas etc)
4. To what extent does the idea, topic, or process offer potential for engaging students?

Brainstorm elements of your course into the three categories using the back of this sheet.

Once you have created your list, review your stated learning objectives and continue reflecting on your course alignment. Do your objectives and your assessments reflect the ‘enduring understandings’ you have identified? Are they weighted too much toward the things worth being ‘familiar’ with?

Taken from: Wiggins, G & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Course: _____

Things worth 'being familiar with'	Things 'essential to know and do'	'Enduring Understandings'