HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING CERTIFICATE

ONLINE SHORT COURSE

MODULE 6 UNIT 1
Video 2 Transcript

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ROB LUE: The benefits of backward design go even beyond the actual design of the course. Backward design also gives you a way to be particularly creative in the assignments themselves. So, what you will discover is, that if you are very clear in your own mind about what your goal is, what your specific objective is that aligns with that goal, and what particular action verb you're going to use for your students in terms of attaining that objective, once you get that action verb down, you want them to apply, you want them to design, you want them to even do something simple like list. That single action verb, though, allows you to think of all wildly creative ways for them to achieve, or actually execute, that action.

So, you might take advantage of digital tools. You might take advantage of group work, of them working together. You might do something that's more kinesthetic. So, for example, let's say you want to do an application kind of assignment where you want them to order and arrange and relate various concepts. You could ask them about that, or you could have them work in teams and do that with Post-its on a board, right, or basically on a table.

So, don't think about, "It's a problem and a problem set, it's a problem and an exam, it's a prompt for a paper". Think about the action itself, right, the synthesis, the concept mapping, the evaluation, the creation of something new, from pre-existing knowledge – and once you have those general activities, you can really open up the world in terms of the kinds of things that you can do with your students that meet those actions. Where they execute those actions, they execute those cognitive activities.

Students come to classes expecting A, B, C, and D to happen. And what we have found, time and time again, the more you mix it up, frankly, the more they're surprised by the assignment, the more they engage deeply with the assignment and, quite frankly, have fun – which we know is a critical part of learning.

Once you have decided what your assignment will be, then you need to decide how you're going to grade that assignment. And, once again, backward design and alignment is a major framework for you to take advantage of. Because, if you have your assignments, which you know reflects a particular action because you know the objective, you can grade the performance of the students aligned to that specific objective.

So, you can think about the degrees to which they have met that specific objective, and build a grading rubric that aligns to that. Because quite often, and I've been guilty of this in the distant past, you will create an assignment, you will have the students do it, you get the assignment back, you kind of look at the assignment, and, on the fly, decide, "Well, I like that answer better than that answer. It's more complete to me, or it's more clever, or it's longer. It's more in-depth". And what you find with that sort of completely ad-hoc process is that, quite often, it's unfair. It's unfair because you end up grading for an objective that you never told the students was, in fact, the objective. And quite often, you run the risk of falling into expecting something of the assignments that you hadn't thought of originally, because you see something that you happen to like, in particular.

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Backward design allows you to be true to your learning objectives and, ultimately, your learning goals in each and every assignment and how you grade them. And, if you think about it, how many of you have heard back from students, "I don't understand why I lost points? It's so unfair. I'm so frustrated"?

And, while we may not be able to eliminate that completely because that's human nature, to some degree, if you're clear on the syllabus what the objective is, you're clear on how a particular assignment meets that objective, and you share with your students what meeting it fully looks like, half way or not at all would look like, believe me it will reduce significantly their confusion as to why they have received a particular grade. And, I think we'd all agree, anything that avoids or limits grade frustration is a fantastic thing and will really help the culture and the learning atmosphere of your course.

ADAM BEAVER: If you would like to revisit any of the content covered in this video, please select the appropriate topic on the screen