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INTRODUCTION

A NEW BLUEPRINT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Blueprints for Achievement in the Cooperative Classroom is more than just another book about cooperation in the classroom. It is a guide for those creative and seasoned teachers who see the cooperative classroom as a community of students eager to learn, not just for higher scores on standardized tests, but for transferring what they learn beyond the schoolhouse walls. It is also a “must read” for those novice teachers who want to start their careers with the best foot forward.

The blueprint concept is more than a simple metaphor for organizing a book. The blueprint metaphor challenges the factory metaphor that has dominated the American concept of schooling for sixty years. For too many decades, Henry Ford’s assembly line has served as the model for American education. The end result? Millions of students, the products of “teacher-proof” curriculum and instruction, roll off the school assembly line and are given evermore easily earned stamps of approval. Supervisors, newly trained with bland checklists, watch as each teacher follows step-by-step instructions. At the end of the line, students are tested, checked, and measured to ensure they meet minimal educational standards.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors had recognized the limits of their assembly lines. It is time for American schools to do the same. In the blueprints metaphor, the schoolhouse is not a factory but rather an artisan’s workshop where the master nourishes and enriches the apprentices’ talents. The apprentices learn not for a one-size-fits-all test; they learn to develop knowledge, skill, and talent that will serve them well when they step into their own world of work.

The blueprints metaphor of the artisan’s shop advocates subtle shifts in the nature of the schoolhouse. In place of learning for a test, it advocates learning for a lifetime. In place of the teacher as dispenser of bits of factual knowledge, it advocates the teacher as master artist. In place of the teacher as giver of information, it advocates the teacher as architect of the intellect.

SHIFTING TO THE BLUEPRINTS METAPHOR

Such a shift sounds like an awesome task. In one sense, it is; in another, the shift allows teachers to do what most dreamed that teaching would allow them to do—develop each child’s unique capabilities to the fullest. It allows them not to punch out copycat products, but rather to create talented students who are ready and able to transfer learning to a multitude of changing challenges.

The shift has already begun in some classrooms. Aided by supportive professional development, emerging research on how the brain works, and encouraging supervisors, thousands of teachers are applying the tools of cooperative learning, thinking, problem-based learning, and problem solving in their classrooms. National professional organizations—American Federation of Teachers, National Council of Mathematics Teachers, National Science Teachers, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Boards for Professional Teaching, National Education Association, and National Staff Development Council—have called for major instructional reforms that use these methods.

Three Levels of Learning

Just what is needed to engage all teachers in this shift? *Blueprints* is organized to give teachers a three-level framework that enables them to redirect their instructional goals. It introduces practical steps for establishing a cooperative climate (level 1), for initiating deep understanding (level 2), and for preparing students for transfer (level 3). (See Figure 0.1.) Certainly, the instructional tools are available to shift from a recall curriculum to a three-level transfer curriculum.

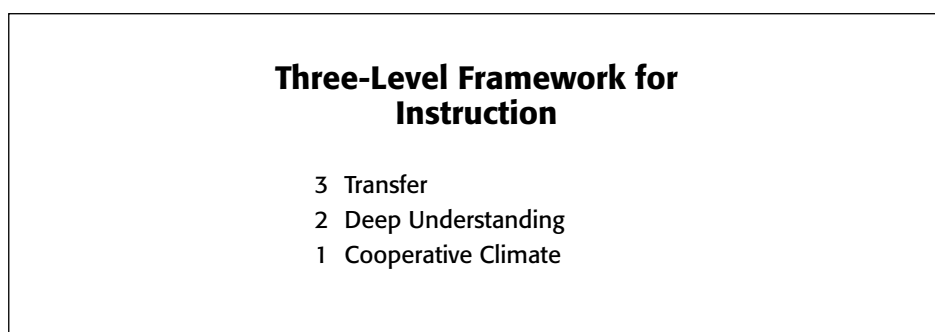


Figure 0.1

At the first level, cooperative learning establishes positive, collaborative relationships among students and teachers. These relationships are essential building blocks in a community of learners with high-level cognitive goals. Cooperative learning encourages internal motivation and collaborative inquiry instead of resorting to coercive discipline practices that rely on external motivation. Cooperative learning replaces self-centered