Elements of a good backward design

The unit or course design

- Reflects a coherent design -- big ideas and essential questions clearly guide the design of, and are aligned with, assessments and teaching and learning activities.

- Makes clear distinctions between big ideas and essential questions, and the knowledge and skills necessary for learning the ideas and answering the questions.

- Uses multiple forms of assessment to let students demonstrate their understanding in various ways.

- Incorporates instruction and assessment that reflects the six facets of understanding -- the design provides opportunities for students to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess.

- Anchors assessment of understanding with authentic performance tasks calling for students to demonstrate their understanding and apply knowledge and skills.

- Uses clear criteria and performance standards for teacher, peer, and self-evaluations of student products and performances.

- Enables students to revisit and rethink important ideas to deepen their understanding.

- Incorporates a variety of resources. The textbook is only one resource among many (rather than serving as the syllabus).

The teacher

- Informs students of the big ideas and essential questions, performance requirements, and evaluative criteria at the beginning of the unit or course.

- Hooks and holds students' interest while they examine and explore big ideas and essential questions.

- Uses a variety of strategies to promote deeper understanding of subject matter.

- Facilitates students' active construction of meaning (rather than simply telling).

- Promotes opportunities for students to "unpack their thinking" -- to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, or self-assess (incorporates the six facets of understanding).

- Uses questioning, probing, and feedback to stimulate student

reflection and rethinking.

- Teaches basic knowledge and skills in the context of big ideas and explores essential questions.

- Uses information from ongoing assessments as feedback to adjust instruction.

- Uses information from ongoing assessments to check for student understanding and misconceptions along the way.

- Uses a variety of resources (beyond the textbook) to promote understanding.

The learners

- Can describe the goals (big ideas and essential questions) and performance requirements of the unit or course.

- Can explain what they are doing and why (i.e., how today's work relates to the larger unit or course goals).

- Are hooked at the beginning and remain engaged throughout the unit or course.

- Can describe the criteria by which their work will be evaluated.

- Are engaged in activities that help them to learn the big ideas and answer the essential questions.

- Are engaged in activities that promote explanation, interpretation, application, perspective taking, empathy, and self-assessment (the six facets).

- Demonstrate that they are learning the background knowledge and skills that support the big ideas and essential questions.

- Have opportunities to generate relevant questions.

- Are able to explain and justify their work and their answers.

- Are involved in self- or peer-assessment based on established criteria and performance standards.

- Use the criteria or rubrics to guide and revise their work.

- Set relevant goals based on feedback.

In the classroom environment

- The big ideas and essential questions are central to the work of the students, the classroom activity, and the norms and culture of the

classroom.

- There are high expectations and incentives for all students to come to understand the big ideas and answer the essential questions.

- All students and their ideas are treated with dignity and respect.

- Big ideas, essential questions, and criteria or scoring rubrics are posted.

- Samples or models of student work are made visible.

- Exploration of big ideas and essential questions is differentiated, so some students are able to delve more deeply into the subject matter than others.

(Wiggins & McTighe)