

January 19, 2007

Key Concepts in the Curriculum: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Those of you who have been around for awhile (and I'm including myself) will remember the old "scope and sequence" charts that gave an overview of the separate skills students were to learn in each subject area, the order in which they should be taught and how they built on each other.

These charts are not around much any more for a couple of reasons. First, we now know from research that students learn in different ways and at different rates. To expect them all to learn skills and come to understand things in the same sequence flies in the face of this. Second, we know that the brain makes sense of things through being exposed to the big ideas and the details at the same time. Our minds are always scanning for ways to fit new bits of information into a larger idea to make sense of them.

This is quite a shift from traditional ideas about learning - that the details are the building blocks for the big idea, and every piece needs to be in place before the larger concept can be grasped. Because we thought this is how people learned, we tended to teach using small bits of sequenced information. Trouble was, these small pieces didn't always add up to understanding the big picture.

This doesn't mean that the "big ideas" just happen or that details aren't important. It's important to know

what the big ideas are and how the prescribed learning outcomes in the Integrated Resource Packages support them. That's where *Key Concepts* comes in - it's an overview of the big ideas in Mathematics and English Language Arts K-12 and how they develop over time in the curriculum. I think this is a fantastic resource, and a timely one too.

Key Concepts is a guide for each grade level in English Language Arts and Mathematics, Kindergarten to Grade 12. Ministry of Education staff has put this resource together in a booklet using a handy chart format, and copies of *Key Concepts* are being distributed to schools, school districts and partner groups this month.

It's important to say upfront that *Key Concepts* is a high level overview, not a list of the Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Mathematics and English Language Arts. *Key Concepts* is derived from BC's curriculum documents (Integrated Resource Packages). Therefore, the terms found in this resource are close to what is found in the IRPs. I encourage you to make links between the *Key Concepts* and the Prescribed Learning Outcomes as you plan Mathematics and Language Arts instruction for the classroom.

The new *Key Concepts* PDF files can be found at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp.htm> ready for printing. This is the same site where you find the complete Prescribed Learning Outcomes listed in the IRPs. The IRPs also offer suggestions about how to assess student learning in the classroom. They are an especially good resource in

terms of assessing “for” learning. Our staff is working on a French translation of the *Key Concepts* to be made available at later date.

Key Concepts is organized by subject area and grade level. This resource can be useful in several ways, and I’m sure you’ll think of some new ones yourself. For starters, it’s useful for:

- planning instruction
- writing previews
- talking with parents about the big ideas that are part of their children’s learning
- serving as a general overview of concepts taught in English Language Arts and Mathematics K-12
- using Integrated Resource Packages for more detailed planning and assessment of outcomes

Over time we’re hoping to build an archive of video demonstration lessons using the outstanding classroom practices of BC teachers in addressing key concepts as a companion piece for the *Key Concepts* resource. These and other useful tools for teachers will eventually be archived at a convenient one-stop web address. Stay tuned for more information on that in the near future. In the meantime, I invite you to enjoy discussing and using *Key Concepts in the Curriculum*.

Canada’s Outstanding Principals Award 2007

We know that we have many dedicated and outstanding teachers in this province making a difference to student learning. We often fail to recognize that we also have many highly skilled principals making a significant

difference in schools where that learning occurs. In fact, the research is clear in demonstrating that an effective principal is a key element to school success and the learning of students in that school. 32 exceptional principals were recently chosen from across Canada by the Learning Partnership. This is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to championing a strong public system in Canada. This organization selects principals who have made a measureable difference in the lives of students and in their own communities.

Five BC principals are among this this prestigious group. They are:

Clyde Dougans
Chilliwack Central Elementary Community School
School District No. 33 (Chilliwack)

Chris Harvey
Arbutus Middle School
School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)

Scott McLean
Spring Valley Middle School
School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

Sandra Sellick
Anne McClymont Elementary School
School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

Janet Slaney
Rutland Elementary School
School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan)

I want to offer my personal congratulations to each of these educators, and we want them to know that we are proud of their contributions the life chances of our students.

LearnNowBC Expands Free Tutoring Services

What's New?

The LearnNowBC website (www.learnnowbc.gov.bc.ca) currently offers a free tutoring service for students, which has just been expanded and improved to help students prepare for exams in January and June. Through the use of technology, LearnNowBC is able to offer this important mechanism to support student achievement.

Who Can Access Tutoring?

These expanded tutoring services are available to all BC students taking Essentials of Math 10, Principles of Math 10, Science 10 or Social Studies 11.

What You Need to Know

Students may come to you with questions about their Personal Education Number (PEN). The tutoring services are accessed on a secure section of the LearnNowBC website, which requires students to create a user name and password. The PEN is the mechanism that validates the person as a BC student. The site advises students to refer to their report cards to find their own PEN. Some may still require assistance, and they are directed to check with their school office or Distance Learning School Office to get their PEN and confirm their "legal" name.

TIP: the most frequent reason for a student to receive an "invalid PEN" response is that they have failed to use their "legal" name!

Overview of Expanded Tutoring Offerings			
Online Tutors	"Live" Workshops	StudyBUZZ	Charged Up for Math/ Charged Up for Science
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tutors are BC accredited teachers, and peer tutors• Available via chat room Sunday-Thursday from 7-9pm• Extended hours in January and June to cover examination periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Live workshops" by BC accredited teachers• Followed by an online group discussion and Question & Answer session• Scheduled workshops begin at 7:30pm, with logins available after 7:15pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available 24 hours a day• Allows students to test themselves• Provides diagnosis to help students focus their studying on weak areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available 24 hours a day• Allows students to access sample provincial exam questions• The most difficult questions are explained through streaming video clips

If you have any questions, please contact LearnNowBC by phone (1-888-688-0884), or email: EDUC.DistanceEducationOnlineLearning@gov.bc.ca