Checklist for Understanding-focused Schooling

Developing Readiness

Defining "the Job": whole-school

Vision – an aspirational target appropriate for today's needs and students.

☐ Review: Even if the vision is vague, it must inspire change (something not yet being achieved) and pertain to this century's issues.

Articulation of Success – detailed descriptors of learners who have been successfully served by their experience at the school or organisation.

☐ Review: the descriptors must be specific enough to identify characteristics that can not be achieved without invoking deeper concepts and significant attitudes in the course of demonstrating accomplishment in novel and realistic contexts. In short, success requires learning focused on meaning-making and transfer goals, not merely acquisition and use of memorised skills.

Declaring Foundational Pedagogies – Given the vision and articulation of what success looks like as learners achieve the vision, some over-arching learning theories or principles should be identified. These are used as the basis for action research and ongoing evaluation of strategies so that the organisation builds knowledge and continues to refine and improve its methods for achieving the vision.

☐ Review: the foundational pedagogies must align with the vision and success descriptors. Are acquisition, meaning-making and transfer all supported by the chosen pedagogies. Be careful that these are not just "strategies" or solutions, but theories based on research upon which hypotheses can be built.

School-wide Transfer Goals (Understandings and Essential Questions if they are already underway)

Defining "the Job": by faculty and years levels

Owning the Vision and Articulation of Success – Now that all staff have participated in and agreed to support the organisation's vision and goals for success, sub-groups from each learning area and age level first identify which descriptors they "own" as core to successfully learning their subjects. Next these groups detail at which year levels and courses these goals are supported and achieved.

☐   Review: This is an important "do not pass go" point as no curriculum units or lessons should be developed unless the faculty sees their contribution as critical to achieving the larger organisational goals.

Identifying Transfer Goals – Faculties choose, modify or write main performance statements that capture what "doing the subject" looks like.

☐   Review: Only enough Transfer Goals are needed so that faculty experts feel comfortable that the integrity of their discipline has been accurately represented. These Transfer Goals can, and will likely, be modified over time, but should initially capture the essence of what makes this a discipline. Check Jay's article: Transfer Goals and Program Missions

Enduring Understandings – Successfully performing the Transfer Goals is a manifestation of conceptual understandings that inform the work of professionals in the field. Faculty experts analyse the Transfer Goals for these enduring understandings and list them as statements.

☐   Review: Again, only enough Enduring Understandings are needed so that faculty experts believe that knowing these understandings empowers actually performing the Transfer Goals.

Essential Questions – Because Enduring Understandings are not "taught," but uncovered/discovered by learners, faculty experts need to identify questions that point students toward the essence of the subject area.

☐   Review: These questions are open-ended and "generative" in that they generate a line of inquiry, not a right answer.

Explore the 6 Facets

Taming Standards – Every jurisdiction provides standards whose achievement is some component of mastering learning areas. Some standards will align with the Transfer Goals and Enduring Understandings, but many will tend to be more specific. Faculty experts must review the standards that pertain to their discipline and "tame" them. Like working with a wild animal, "taming" is a process. First, getting more familiar with the standards takes away fear. Second, like a pack of wild beasts, we learn the particular nature of the standards – how they behave together and a better understanding of their true intent. Third, we learn to handle them – we see that some work well in groups while others are better one-on-one. Finally, we've tamed them so that they do our bidding – we apply standards to Transfer Goals and Enduring Understandings as they fit comfortably and are well away of those we won't turn on our backs on.

☐   Review: Standards are grouped into related processes or concepts that evidence an intellectual coherence. Some that don't fit into these groupings might be easily achieved as core, repeated activities or one-off / as-needed skill-building exercises for students who have not mastered the outcome.

Defining Cornerstone Tasks – With the Transfer Goals and their related Understandings clearly articulated and the mandated standards tamed and aligned where appropriate, faculty experts need to define "Cornerstone Tasks" that give structure and integrity to the discipline's curriculum framework. These core tasks describe year-level embodiments of the established goals (the collective term for Transfer Goals, Enduring Understandings and mandated standards).

☐ Review: Cornerstone Tasks include core skills, understandings and attitudes that are aligned with the established goals and are realistically represented across courses and year levels in a continuum of accomplishment.

Fleshing-out Your Assessments – the Cornerstone Tasks are major performance assessments that give shape and integrity to the whole faculty's curriculum. However, other enabling skills, bodies of knowledge or conceptual understandings that are used by students in these Cornerstone Tasks are best assessed well before major performances. These assessments emerge out of a "Cornerstone Task Analysis." They can provide feedback on student learning and guide development of classroom activities. At this point, the actual assessment is not needed, but this list of "other assessments" should reflect both required and anticipated measures to ensure mastery of the established goals.

☐ Review: Not every assessment will be or needs to be listed at this point, but a spot-check of those compiled will reveal whether staff simply revert to extant assessments (possibly dominated by acquisition goals) or take the challenge to envision assessments as indicators of student progress toward becoming "successful learners."

Developing First Units

Designing Units with the UbD Template 2.0

Finding your Entry Point – Developing units using the Understanding by Design Template is not a linear process: you don't have to start with Stage 1. Wiggins and McTighe have created the worksheet "Various Template Entry Points" that can be useful. The identified entry points are:

1. A real-world, transfer goal
2. An important aha!
3. A thought- provoking question
4. An important activity or lesson
5. Key resource(s) or text
6. A key test or assessment
7. Content standards/ established goals

Figure C.3
Various Template Entry Points