



C AND I UPDATE



Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction

www.teacherweb.com/PA/AOP/ElementaryCurriculumandInstruction/index.html

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Celebrations from varied perspectives. . .

This month there are celebrations of many things. The focus of each celebration, though, depends on your perspective. As I write this, we are celebrating what many refer to as Ground Hog's Day. At one time in the past this fortieth day after Christmas was considered the end of the Christmas season, though, as the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, also the feast of the Purification of Mary. Coincidentally, the word February comes from the word 'februa' - which means cleansing or purification, and reflects the cleansing rituals undertaken before Spring. Our Grandmothers looked to this day as the day they were able to get their blessed candles in church. They referred to it as Candlemas Day. People believed that Candlemas Day predicted the weather for the rest of the winter. (And we thought it was Punxsutawney Phil!) An old proverb read:

*If Candlemas Day be fair and bright
Winter will have another fight.
If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain,
Winter won't come again.*



Candles were used the very next day on the feast of St. Blasé for the blessing of throats.

Several other days during the month of February have dual celebrations. If you mention February 14, most people would associate the day with St. Valentine because of the commercialism of the day in our country. The Church, however, celebrates SS. Cyril and Methodius, 9th century missionaries to the Slavic people. This year February 22 will be celebrated on the calendar as the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary. In the past, though, we've commemorated it as a day of "firsts"—celebrating the Chair of St. Peter, our first Pope and the birthday of George Washington, our first president. Because we now celebrate all presidents on one day, many of our students probably don't know that we had special days in February for both Washington and Lincoln (whose 200th birthday is this year.)

There are many other days worthy of remembrance this month and worthy of sharing with our students. The month began with the feast commemorating the 40th day after Christmas. At the end of the month, the 40th day before Easter occurs as we begin the season of Lent. There are many opportunities for teachable moments at this time.

As a Catholic educator, I see this as an opportunity to re-think priorities. Will our students focus as much on the Christian traditions found on the liturgical calendar as they will on the secular traditions? Will Valentine's day supercede the beautiful feasts of Mary and the Saints that are celebrated this month? Will Mardi Gras/Doughnut Day festivities make more of an impression on our students than Ash Wednesday? Will our classroom environment include a bulletin board with multiple Valentines' hearts or one focusing on the hearts of Jesus and Mary?

What perspective will you share with your students this month?

Curriculum, and Assessment—

Quality Assessments

Curriculum, instruction and assessment are closely connected. A good curriculum without quality instruction will not produce good standardized testing results. Likewise, quality instruction based on a poor curriculum, is not as effective as it could be. But what about assessment? What is the purpose of assessment?

We need to ask ourselves some questions about the assessments we are using:

- How will we know whether students have achieved the desired results? (*Is there a direct correlation between the assessment and your stated objectives in your lesson plan?*)
- What will we accept as evidence of student understanding and proficiency? (*What quadrant was the lesson presented in? Have you limited your assessment to Quadrant A expectations?*)
- How can assessment promote learning, not simply measure it? (*Are you teaching and practicing assessment skills during the course of everyday instruction? Are you modeling your own assessments*)
- What grading and reporting practices support learning and encourage learners? (*Do you focus on the learning in your assessment and avoid non-academic characteristics [e.g. effort, timing, un-related content] in your rubrics?*)
- What will we do when students don't learn? (*What do you do with the test results? Are they used to plan further instruction in areas needing remediation?*)

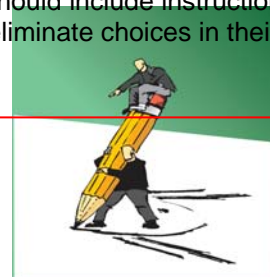
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Constructing Good Assessments

To assist teachers in developing good assessments, the following guidelines are being repeated here. These are not new but are solid recommendations worth reviewing to assist teachers in developing assessments which model the type of assessments which should be used.

Our first focus will be on constructing Multiple Choice questions which are one of the question types used in standardized testing. Unfortunately, because they are more tedious to construct, they are less frequently used in classroom assessments.

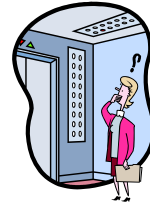
Teachers should use this type of question more often and should include instruction and practice on how to eliminate choices in their teaching.



Multiple-Choice Tests

Strengths

- ✓ Maintains high reliability and validity
- ✓ Is effective in measuring learning at all levels
- ✓ Is resistant to random guessing
- ✓ Provides for large sampling of content
- ✓ Lends itself to variation
- ✓ Provides for little ambiguity
- ✓ Can be scored on a completely objective basis



Weaknesses

- ✓ Is limited in measuring the ability of students to organize and present ideas
- ✓ Is difficult to construct in that plausible incorrect choices are difficult to design at times

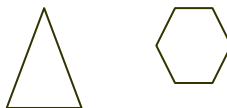
Constructing Multiple Choice Items

1. Be sure the stem of the item clearly formulates a problem and the answer choices are homogeneous in content.
2. Include as much of the item as possible in the stem and keep the answer choices as short as possible and of uniform length.
3. Write the stem in the form of a question or an incomplete statement.
4. Avoid specific determiners so as not to provide a grammatical clue. (e.g. a/an)
5. Provide at least four choices with only one correct or clearly best answer.
6. Vary the position of the correct answer.
7. Make all answer choices plausible and about the same length and complexity.
8. Avoid the use of "none of the above" and "all of the above."

Sample Questions

1. A figure with five sides and five angles is called a

- A. triangle
- B. quadrilateral
- C. pentagon
- D. hexagon





2. Temperature and precipitation in a place at a given time is called

- A. environment
- B. weather
- C. community
- D. climate



CALENDAR

February

- 2 Feast of the Presentation of Jesus; Purification of Mary; Candlemas Day; Ground Hog Day
- 3 Feast of St. Blasé
- 6 Elementary Honor Band Concert at Archbishop Wood H.S.
- 6-8 Title I Reading Conference
- 11 Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes
- 12 Early Childhood Rigor and Relevance Social Studies Workshop
Lincoln's 200th Birthday 
- 14 Feast of SS. Cyril and Methodius
Valentine's Day
- 16 President's Day
- 21 Math, ILA, Library and Assessment Conference at St. Christopher
- 22 Chair of St. Peter; Washington's Birthday 
- 25 Ash Wednesday
- 28 Early Childhood Conference at Stella Maris. (Make-up date)

MARCH

- 10-12 Integrating Language Across the Curriculum
- 12 Middle States Planning Sessions
- 21 Scintillating Saturday for Science
- TBA Foldables
Workshops

Opportunities for Teachers

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History Summer Seminars for Teachers. Here is the web site for information about the seminars <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/seminars1.html>. There are different dates from July to August.

Seminars offer:

- Room and board
- Books and teaching resources
- Stipends of \$400 (international seminar stipend of \$500)

Seminars are limited to thirty participants by competitive application. Preference is given to new applicants.

The Library of Congress is offering One Day Teacher Institutes on Abraham Lincoln. Dates are Feb. 27, Feb. 28, Mar. 27, or Mar. 28 from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. There is a limit of twenty teachers for each date.

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History Uncovered - ABC-CLIO'S Annual Research Competition

This year's challenge: select the top 10 people, events, or places that have shaped the course of history. ABC-CLIO, an award-winning publisher of history reference and research resources in print and online, welcomes you to the first annual HISTORY UNCOVERED competition. HERE'S THE PLACE TO START: www.abc-clio.com/HistoryUncovered

Now through March 15, 2009

, middle school students can "go green" and team up for the [Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge](#), the first and only national K-12 sustainability education initiative aligned to education standards.

Prizes for students and teachers include Regional and National Recognition, Cash and an Appearance on Discovery's Planet Green Television Network.

The Challenge is entirely web-based and provides a robust collection of resources for students and teachers from interactive labs to lesson plans, custom developed by the same curriculum team that brings you our award-winning services **Discovery Education streaming** and **Discovery Education Science**.

Come check it out at wecanchange.com and you can even take a quiz to measure your own environmental IQ!

The competition is open to all U.S. middle school students between grades 6-8. Teams will be made up of two to three students and a teacher or adult advisor (i.e. parent, Girl/Boy Scout leader etc.). The initiative will expand to elementary schools in 2009 and to high schools in 2010.

Teams will be judged by a panel of environmental experts and science educators. Teams will be judged on their ability to create a positive, measurable solution to a local environmental problem or issue using scientific methodology and how well they explain how the solution can be replicated by other communities.

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A Final Note. . .

In the past few C and I Updates, I have been asking to hear about the good things that are happening in our schools so that I could share them with others. I haven't had much response, but I did have two good things happen this past week that I just had to share.

Late last Friday afternoon as I sat at my desk trying to make sense of the varied piles of paper on it, the phone rang and I answered it. It was an older gentleman who many years ago had graduated from Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese. He was aware that it was Catholic Schools Week and said that he couldn't let the week without thanking someone for the Education he had received in our schools. Never underestimate the impact you have on your students.

The second good thing that happened was as a result of a mistake—I was up late one night trying to register some teachers into Coursewhere for this week's Title I Conference. I came across several schools where not all of the teachers were registered in the system. In my haste to complete my task, I was attempting to e-mail the principals of the schools involved to ask their assistance in having the missing teachers register on Coursewhere. I inadvertently clicked the "send" button before narrowing it down to my intended recipient. What could have been a nightmare, turned out to be a relatively pleasant experience. I did send out a retracting statement, but spent a good amount of time the next day responding to almost 200 e-mails. Most assured me that they were not the intended recipient, but so many also offered to be of assistance in locating her and passing on the message. After receiving my apology, one person even reassured me by transferring the blame to my computer, not me. I re-connected with a few former co-workers I hadn't heard from in years and even had one e-mail offering to get one of my nephews to assist me! It was a beautiful expression of the kindness that is out there among our teachers and gives me the opportunity to say "THANK YOU" for all you are and all you do! May God bless you!