

## Constructive Learning Defined<sup>i</sup>

This is simply a different and effective way to organize the classroom, the learning, the sequence of activities, and the determination of a student's grade. Its foundation lies in the work of two important psychologists; Benjamin Bloom<sup>ii</sup> who developed a taxonomy of cognitive (thinking) levels - and as refined in the 1990's and 2000's by Anderson<sup>iii</sup> & Krathwol<sup>iv</sup> - and Jean Piaget<sup>v</sup>, the well known developmental psychologist and his theory of constructivism<sup>vi</sup> in education. A nod and a wink have to be given to Socrates as well.

In practice in the **Bridging History** course at HSPVA, the following terminology and structure is utilized.

UNITS	These correspond to the marking periods; there are six per year. The total points accumulated by the student in the unit equate to the student's final grade for the marking period. These answer the question, "how do I get the grade I want in this class?"
THEMES	There are five to seven of these per unit. They represent the "big ideas" that tell the human story from the past through to the present. These answer the question, "what is the point of studying history?"
TOPICS	These are subjects, often "case studies" that assist the student in understanding a theme. These answer the question, "how can I understand this big idea?" Topics have a point value that accumulates as the student moves through (discovers) a theme.
OBJECTIVES	These are learning targets designed to determine whether a student understands a topic. These answer the question, "what am I supposed to learn from this?"
ASSIGNMENTS	These are the specific tasks the student performs in order to "learn" the topic. These answer the questions, "what am I supposed to do in class?" and "what can I do to learn the objective?" Students are given choices of assignments used to learn objectives.
ASSESSMENTS	As with the Socratic Method, these are questions the teacher poses to the student (sometimes in written form, more often orally) designed to determine whether or not a student understands an objective. The student decides when he or she is ready to assess, and students may assess again, if needed, within the time limits of the unit.

At the beginning of each unit students receive two types of documents that guide them through the learning. These are maintained in the classroom, but are also available on the class web site.

- **A Unit Scoring Plan:** This is a single sheet that lists the themes, assignments and the points associated with those assignment. Together, the teacher and student track the student's progress on this sheet and maintain a running total of the points earned in the unit.
- For each theme explored in a unit, students receive a **Learning Targets Plan**. This document identifies all the objectives, by topic, within a given theme.

Within a **theme**, a student builds their learning by starting with the simplest thinking level, *knowledge of topics* ("C" level work). Once he or she has demonstrated understanding of enough **objectives** to accumulate the needed points (75), he or she may move on to the next level, *application & processing* ("B" level work – 13 more points), and finally to *interpretation & creation*, ("A" level work – 12 more points). Please note that all learners move to the next succeeding level. The learning builds much like a pyramid, within a theme, the "C" level work is done, then the "B" work, and then "A" work. If a student does not

assess on the upper level work, or is unable to demonstrate mastery, that work will appear as “missing” in the gradebook and that student’s score would remain a 75 for that theme.

This offers transparency to both students and parents. Now, a “C” grade has concrete meaning, and the steps needed to move to the next cognitive level, and therefore the next grade, is clear and straightforward.

There are other tangible benefits to this system.

- **Choice:** Students may select from a range of **assignments** in order to complete any given objective. Assignments within a level can be completed in any sequence. This is especially useful in a school such as HSPVA in which demands on student time varies from week to week. Further, the student informs the teacher when they are ready for an assessment. Part of every class day is devoted to allowing students face to face time with the teacher for this purpose.
- **Accountability:** Rather than hoping for a grade “given” by the teacher, students “earn” the grade they wish to achieve. Students learn 100% of the objectives in a given level, not some “acceptable” percentage below 100.
- **Higher Level Thinking:** All students start at the simplest level of learning in a given theme. Then “layers” are added to bring them to increasingly complex thinking. This is how everyone learns; this system merely matches the classroom and grading structure to the way in which people learn.
- **Adapting to the Learner:** Closely aligned with “choice” above, in each level, students can select assignments and assessments that match their language proficiency, reading level, and thinking style. In any given classroom there are students for whom other languages were learned before English; who are reading well below or above grade level; who are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners; and who may be bored with traditional instruction. This system ensures that all students have the opportunity to learn in a way that is meaningful for them.

So this learning and grading system is “constructive learning” in that each student **builds** his or her understanding in a logical and structured way. It is also constructive in that it is a meaningful and clear cut way to make the classroom meet the needs of all learners.

**Please sign one copy of this explanation and have your student return it in class.**

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Student’s Name

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Parent/guardian signature

Be sure to keep an eye on **BinghamsPlace.com**, your best source of information about the class!

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<sup>i</sup> Layered Curriculum is a registered trademark of Dr. Kathie F. Nunley.

<sup>ii</sup> Bloom, B. S.; Engelhart, M. D.; Furst, E. J.; Hill, W. H.; Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. New York: David McKay Company

<sup>iii</sup> Bloom, B. S. (1994). *Reflections on the development and use of the taxonomy*. In Rehage, Kenneth J.; Anderson, Lorin W.; Sosniak, Lauren A. "Bloom's taxonomy: A forty-year retrospective". *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education)

<sup>iv</sup> Krathwohl, David R. (2002). "A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview". *Theory Into Practice* (Routledge)

<sup>v</sup> Piaget, Jean. (1950). *The Psychology of Intelligence*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>vi</sup> Vygotskii, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press