

**Dr. Lorin Anderson Podcast**  
**Interview Transcript—Part Two**  
**Interview conducted by Dal Edwards**  
**April 8, 2009**  
**12:15-1:00**

(Music)

Lorin Anderson is a distinguished professor emeritus at the University of South Carolina. He has researched and published in the areas of classroom instruction and school learning, effective programs and practices for economically disadvantaged children and youth, the allocation and use of school time, and effective assessment. He is the senior editor and contributor to *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* published in 2001.

He is currently consulting with North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction in the revision of the content standards.

(Music)

We are here at the Department of Public Instruction with Dr. Lorin Anderson who is in the middle of a day consulting with various sections of DPI on the standards revision process. Dr. Anderson, thank you for agreeing to do this podcast interview with the Social Studies Section here at DPI. We appreciate your time.

**Question:**

How is North Carolina using RBT to currently revise the standard course of study and develop essential standards?

**Anderson:**

(1:33) What it's supposed to do, which is really I think the heart of your question, it's supposed to provide a common framework for looking at what's really important in education. So many of our state standards tend to be just collections of...scores of standards, that are just thrown out there. In many states the format for English-language arts standards is different from the format of science and social studies. That causes great problems for elementary school teachers. They don't notice it as much in high school because if you only teach science, you accept the format of the science standards. But if you're teaching third grade and you're teaching all four major academic subjects, then all of a sudden you have to learn four different languages...that this is the way ELA presents it, this is the way science presents it, social studies presents it, and so forth.

So we tried to come up with a common framework that allowed people to think about things in a similar way; and also a language to talk about things in a similar way. As I said before, that's possible, because when we built the revised taxonomy we wanted to make sure it was appropriate for different subject matters and different grade levels. And I think that's really what people are starting to realize...that this allows, particularly elementary teachers, to work within a single framework. That when they use the word "apply" in science, that's the same as "apply" in social studies, that's the same as "apply" in ELA, and so forth and so on...(3:05)

**Question:**

This revision process, how is going to impact the development of curriculum and instruction? How is it going to look in the classroom?

**Anderson:**

The first thing that people will recognize...is you're going to have fewer standards, fewer objectives. Even the original taxonomy, they didn't deal with lesson objectives...you know, they dealt with kind of objectives that would take weeks to teach.

(3:30)

And one of the reasons for that (fewer standards), is we're dealing with state level issues. It's my opinion that one of the reasons state tests are harder than teacher tests is that state tests are end of course, end of grade, cumulative. Teachers typically don't give tests like that. They teach a unit or chapter and then they give the test and then they do another one and so forth. Well the more micro-scopic your objectives are and you teach it in September, in my view, the less likely it is the kids will remember that when they are tested on it in December or May if it's a semester versus a year course. So we had to talk about more general statements of objectives, more chunks of content, it wasn't just knowing the battles of the Revolutionary War that was too small (4:19). It was really seeing the Revolutionary War as conflict and being able to operate within that general thing and then within that, people may decide or not decide that knowing the battles is important or not. So they are able to make more decisions. If you start thinking of the Revolutionary War as an entity, as a key content area then the objective is written at that level. In other words students will analyze the Revolutionary War in terms of causes, consequences, long term effects, whatever...That's how the statements that you will see are written. It's not that they'll know the battles and know the generals and then dates and then they do a timeline, those are all too specific. And also from our point of view those are really means to an end that if you want those there has to be something bigger in which those isolated pieces are embedded if they are going to be remembered longer than a day and a half. And so we take a bigger perspective on curriculum, which then, of course, leads to fewer of the essential standards. So that's one thing that you are going to see.

The second thing that you are going to see is that we address issues of objectives and assessment simultaneously. In a lot of cases we have here are the objectives and then we farm out the writing of the assessment to someone else. By virtue of our language, mainly English, no matter how precise we try to write these objectives, or essential standards, they don't mean the same thing to everybody. People read into these things what they want to read into them. A lot of experienced teachers read into them the way they've always have taught, so they don't need to learn anything new or teach anything differently (6:00). But that's just human nature I believe, it's not a criticism it's just the way we operate in most cases. To me what assessments do, what a problem does, or what a question does, or what a test item does, is to make the more abstract objective more concrete. And in general, as humans, we are more concrete, we like concrete things, we like to get our hands on things. And so when we put them together, that is to say objectives and assessments, it helps both sides. It helps those that are coming up with the standards, the essential standards. It forces them to make sure they understand what they are doing, because the proof of the pudding is in the eating. (lf)

We don't know what question to ask the kids or what problem we hope them to solve. We really don't understand what we are supposed to be teaching. We kind of have some vague idea of what we are supposed to teach, like in the previous example--the Revolutionary War (7:00). But there is so much you can teach about the Revolutionary War. You can do a whole college course, which they do. But in the time that we have we have to focus, and the sooner you focus you have to put some things in and put some things out. And not only is it a content issue, but it is a cognitive process issue. What in terms of thinking? What in terms of memorization, do you want? Do you want them to memorize dates and places of battles? Is that what it means to learn the American Revolution? Or is it an understanding of the American Revolution as simply one conflict and can we learn from that so we don't have conflicts all over the place? Or can we realize that without the Revolutionary War maybe we wouldn't have evolved into the type of democracy that we do (have). Which makes the question of can we go in and mandate democracy in other parts of the country? I mean other parts of the world, I should say? Is that a feasible thing given our struggle to really decide what democracy meant? (8:00) Or was it really after the Civil War that we finally had states that bought into it?

**Question:** Given what you just said, does this process sort of lend itself to the development of higher order thinking when it comes to the standards and what expectations should be?

**Anderson:** It does. Because what it forces you to do, I think, it raises possibilities that we don't necessarily think about. The more stuff we put into any finite amount of time--by stuff I'm talking (about) content, materials, textbooks, videos and so forth--the less cognitive demands we can place on kids. Because we're so busy covering the stuff, we tend to downgrade the cognitive process dimension to remember--remember this, remember this, remember this. But the more we try and put stuff in that needs to be covered, the more we push kid's cognitive processing down to memorization. So, looking at the possibilities of are we teaching for understanding? Are we teaching how to use knowledge to solve academic and practical problems?(9:05) Are we teaching kids how to analyze societies, political events? Are we asking kids to evaluate position papers taken by ministers of education, or presidents? Or do they just accept it as gospel because it came from higher authority? These are all the possibilities you have once you start thinking about going beyond memorization. But the challenge here is that if you're going to go in that direction, you have to by definition cut down on the amount of stuff. That's probably, as I look at social studies as a separate area...that's going to be a very difficult thing in social studies, because they like their stuff. (9:48)

As we think about what's really appropriate for fifth grade social studies in the larger context of a social studies curriculum and given how much time is spent in fifth grade on social studies, those are the constraints in which some of these decisions have to be made.

**Question:** Considering this next generation of standards and accountability that we've been talking about, what should the next generation of schools look like?

**Anderson:** They need to be more balanced curricular wise than they are. And by balanced I mean, within the revised taxonomy, a balance between the knowledge and the cognitive processes.

We tend to have extremists in education, and you'll see some of this in social studies. So I see the schools of the future as being able to recognizing that need for that balance. You can't have too much knowledge. You can't have too much cognitive processing. You can't have too little knowledge, you can't have too little cognitive processing. It has to be just right.

I also see a huge need in the schools of the future for greater concern for alignment. We've really been trying to work on this with the revised taxonomy...that once you know what your objective is, that should inform how you teach. To teach kids to analyze requires a different set of teaching skills than to teach kids to memorize (11:08). So, there should be instructional consequences of how we choose to frame those objectives. And likewise assessment should be aligned. It's a different thing to memorize certain things, as opposed to analyze certain things. If you're analyzing certain things, you're assessment has to give kids situations, and you have to get kids to learn how to look at that situation and make decisions about what's relevant in this situation to my solving this problem or answering this question. But we can't sit down and teach for analyze and all of a sudden have a bunch of who, what, where, when, why questions on a test. Or we can't say we're going to have analyze as an objective and have teachers stand up like I am right now and pontificate. Kids learn to analyze by certainly modeling analyzing, but a lot of it is learning to analyze by analyzing and learning from your mistakes. So it requires a lot of shifting in the way in which, I think, teachers approach the craft of teaching. And it requires a lot of changes in the way that we envision assessment. But the guiding principle under all this is curriculum alignment (12:19)--that there is a consistency of our objectives, our instruction, and our assessment. Because when things are in alignment teaching is better, learning is better. And the long term consequences for successful schools over time, from K through graduation, are higher as well.

So I would say the two major things that I would see as critical to the future of schools is balance, rather than extremism, and alignment, rather than pieces of things where everybody is in their own little room working on one part of it. What I see now in many schools is exactly the opposite. I see people with extreme positions advocating their agenda, teachers going to conferences and coming up with a great new idea running in, and curriculum coordinators in big school districts hear a speaker, and we're going to do this now, superintendents that are able to come in and dismantle what's there just because they're superintendents regardless of how effective what's been there in the past has been. And I see too much segmentation of responsibility for curriculum, for instruction, and assessment. There has to be a much better fit. And again, that's one of the reasons, that as we get people to conceptualize objectives, we simultaneously get them to think about the implications for assessment. Once those are aligned then we can move to saying (that) if these are the objectives and this is the way we're assessing the objectives, how should we teach now in ways that are likely to be successful.

**Comment:** Dr. Anderson, thank you so much for your wisdom and your direction in this process...and thank you again for this interview. I appreciate it.

**Dr. Anderson:** Thank you.