Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe describe Backward Design

Grant Wiggins:
"Mindful of the three stages of design: identify the desired results, determine the acceptable evidence and then, and only then, plan the learning, let's think about stage one. How do we identify, with the necessary specificity, the insights that we want the student to leave with? How do we do that in a practical way, given where we live—in a world of standards and content?"

Jay McTighe:
"On the template, Box A says: what do we want students to really understand? What are the enduring understandings we are after, embedded in the course in the content standards? Box B [says]: through what essential questions will we develop those understandings? The essential question becomes a doorway for uncovering and exploring big ideas. And then Box C [says]: what knowledge and skills are needed to meet the standard and are important prerequisites to the understandings that we hope to cultivate?"