

Community Reading

October 11, 2002

ARMS Standard: **Staff will act as a learning community** (supports our collaboration, mutual respect, and supportive vision statements), including:

- Standard-based planning is a better way to plan (another unit)
- Value collaboration and learning communities (and use collaboration to plan and evaluate), working as "learning teams"
- See the walk-through, observation, and evaluation process as a form of staff development
- Read, seek-out, discuss, and share professional literature

Evidence:

- A collaboratively developed, delivered, and assessed unit plan
- Study (and book) group participation
- Peer observation (administration coverage)
- Peer review of standards-based units and other work
- Weekly article to read (not just administratively originated. Invite teachers to suggest articles. Have an essential question for the article)
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- Increased Monday Teas (Reading in the Content Area, Literature Circles in the Content Area, Action Research, Study Groups,)
- Learning Team Work

Standards based planning means beginning with the end in mind. There are different templates and guides that are available to assist with standards based planning, but, again, quite simply, it means beginning with the end in mind. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have resources to assist planning using an approach they call "Backward Design." Heidi Hayes Jacobs has a model. Paula Rutherford, too, has templates and organizers to help. She just calls it "Standards Based Planning." No matter the particular templates used, the fundamentals are the same:

1. Identify what you want the students to learn and do
2. Determine how students show you what they know and can do
3. Plan the learning opportunities to get you to steps 1 and 2

On October 29th, all Greece middle schools are closed so we can attend the Middle School Conference Day. Last year, we worked in standards area to become better standards based planners (you should still have your notebook). This year, those efforts continue, with the addition of a special guest who will work with us that day: Jay McTighe. In preparation for that day, the attached article is an overview of "Backward Design."

Enjoy your (long) weekend. Make sure you "play!"
-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

October 25, 2002

ARMS Standard: **Staff will act as a learning community** (supports our collaboration, mutual respect, and supportive vision statements), including:

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Jay McTighe’s book, *Understanding by Design*, written with Grant Wiggins, is the book in which the idea of Backward Design is delineated. On Tuesday, at the Middle School Conference Day, Jay will convey some of his work to us. Although Backward Design is what we focus on most out of his book, the real focus is on student understanding. He purports that students will understand if we plan learning experiences that are standards based (backward).

Last year, we really started to plan backward, using these steps:

1. Identify what you want the students to learn and do
2. Determine how students show you what they know and can do
3. Plan the learning opportunities to get you to steps 1 and 2

All sorts of templates were shared with you, and you’ll get some more templates that might work for you on Tuesday. For this week’s article, however, we’ve attached another copy of Paula Rutherford’s interpretation of Backward Design. She states questions that you can ask yourself as you plan Backward.

We’re looking forward to working with you (and Jay McTighe) on October 29th.

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

November 1, 2002

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Wow! The work we did on Tuesday at the Middle School Conference was so perfectly aligned to the work we've been doing in our school over the past couple of years! Jay did a great job to lay out exactly what we've been working on for a couple of years, now. He elegantly described many of the things we're already doing and reminded us why this work is so important. He had examples for every standard area, and quickly followed up electronically with even more!

In the limited time we had with him, he focused on Stages One and Two. He also had some great tools to share with us about Stage Three (planning the learning experiences). So, for this week's article, we suggest that you review the material he shared with us on Tuesday. Take a look through the booklet we received (a booklet that should eventually land in your Standards Based Planning Binder). Take a close look at the last few pages — things he didn't have the chance to review with us. He uses some organizing schemes such as G.R.A.S.P. and W.H.E.R.E. that are helpful. He also introduces a neat way to assess understanding: posing a misconception to your students and seeing if your students can catch and correct the misunderstanding.

This was another good (but exhausting) week for Arcadia Middle School. Our professional learning was evident on Tuesday, and our spirit was evident on Halloween. What a school!
-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

November 8, 2002

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Our collaborative efforts are really heating up! There is evidence in many places around Arcadia Middle School:

- Math teachers taking a day to plan
- Social Studies teacher presenting together at a state conference
- Humanities Teachers constructing one curriculum map that includes both areas
- Science teachers coordinating a school-wide science experiment
- Art teachers teaching their student teacher backward design

This is by no means a comprehensive list. For example, we all collaborated on Tuesday on all sorts of priorities and units. Many of you are using one or more of the organizers that we’ve made available — especially as the backward design work progresses. With regard to the backward designed units, we’ve been working to create a new rubric to use with the units this year. Because so many of you are well into your unit planning, we thought this was a good time to give you the rubric. So, attached is the first part of the rubric, which addresses Stage One: Identify Desired Results. The others will follow, stage by stage.

The upcoming mini-conference represents another example of the capacity we’re building within each other — we are our best resources! Enjoy the long weekend. Enjoy the weather.

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

November 15, 2002

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How is your collaborative planning going? Let's recap:

- With your collaborators, you've identified what we should be working on collaboratively, prioritizing
- We've had articles (lots) about collaboration and planning to read
- We spent the day with Jay McTighe
- We've had work time at community meetings
- We've started to use the collaborative planning time built our schedule
- We've received support from our colleagues via today's mini-conference

In short, we've been working hard! Recognizing how much there is still to do, and how much we'll want to apply what we've learned at the mini-conference, Tuesday's Community Meeting will be additional collaboration work time. While you work, please make sure to do these two things:

1. Share with each other what you learned at the different mini-conference sessions you attended
2. Complete the attached organizer and give it to Jeff (one per collaboration team is fine.)

Enjoy the collaboration, today. Feel the professionalism and collegiality! Awesome!

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

November 22, 2002

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Let's review our Community Readings for the year so far. For the first month or so, we read about professional learning communities (and collaboration), including what they look like and what that sort of a climate and culture does for teaching and learning. Then, we turned our attention to standards based planning and backward design. We read several articles from Jay McTighe and a couple of other sources about *beginning with the end in mind*: the identification of what it is we want our students to know and be able to do.

Once we've identified where we want our students to go, it's time to consider the evidence we want students to show us to indicate understanding. In other words, how do you know? The focus in step two of the standards-based planning process is on assessment and evidence. Our articles between now and the December break will focus on evidence and assessment. It seems only fitting that we start off the series with more of Jay's work, this time an overview he calls: "Evidence of Understanding."

By the way, the feedback about Friday afternoon and our mini-conference is that it was a productive, positive, and professional time of collaboration and collegiality. Thanks to everyone who made it possible — it was a great deal of work that actually began last year! It was an example of what makes this such a great place to work and learn.

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

December 13, 2002

ARMS Standard: **Staff will act as a learning community** (supports our collaboration, mutual respect, and supportive vision statements), including:

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It's been a couple of weeks since our last “community reading.” We left off with an overview from Jay McTighe of step two in the backward design process: evidence. Jay's advice for us was to think like an assessor or judge, designing assessments that require students to be found guilty of understanding.

Assessment used to mean a unit or chapter test that we created as we neared the end of the content we intended to cover. It would be “time” for a test, so we'd create one, administer it, and begin the next unit or chapter the following day. Our understanding of assessment has evolved since then, and now we design the larger assessment before we start the unit, before we plan the learning opportunities and activities. Our use of assessment has also evolved to include more and more formative assessment. This article, by Chappuis and Stiggins, discusses formative assessment and how it provides information about progress for students *and* teachers.

At Tuesday's community meeting we're going to take a light-hearted look at our planning, collaboration, and instruction. Bring your singing voice and creativity. Really. Have a great weekend!

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

January 3, 2003

ARMS Standard: **Staff will act as a learning community** (supports our collaboration, mutual respect, and supportive vision statements), including:

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Our focus now transitions to stage three of the standards based planning process. Stage three is a when we actually plan the learning opportunities that will get our students to the standards we identified in stage one. We used to start with the activities we wanted to do with our kids, got started, and decided it was time for a test when we were about “done.” Using backward design, all that is done before planning learning opportunities. During the month of January, the articles will be directed to planning the learning opportunities for your unit. Looking ahead:

January 10—WHERE (Jay McTighe)

January 17—10:2 Theory (adopted from Paula Rutherford)

January 24—The Essential Nine (Marzano)

January 31—Active Learning Checklist

Standards based planning, or backward design, might itself be referred to as a purposeful task analysis of a unit. The same purposeful task analysis is necessary when planning the learning opportunities for your students. The attached contains some suggestions for task analyzing the content and skills you expect of your students, when planning learning opportunities. Tuesday’s community meeting is WORK TIME. Although a deadline for the unit has not been set, you should be progressing on your collaborative units. Anytime you’ve got a draft we’d love to see it and offer our thoughts. Welcome back, and, Happy New Year!

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

January 10, 2003

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When Jay McTighe was here in October, he spent most of his time sharing ways we can work on the first parts of standards-based design. He didn't have the opportunity to share any of his ideas and experience about planning the learning experiences and opportunities (stage 3). He does, however, have a great deal to share to help us with this.

One tool he does have to share uses the acronym WHERE. On the reverse is the overview organizer for WHERE. It's an organizer that will help you design learning opportunities and to assess the learning opportunities you now employ. Each letter, W-H-E-R-E, stands for one element that Jay wants us to consider when planning. For example, W stands for *where* and *why*. In other words, how will you help students know where they have come from and where they are going? How will they know why they are doing what they are asked to do. This orients them toward the purpose of the work, key assignments, performance tasks, and the criteria by which their work will be judged. Paula Rutherford calls it *Framing the Learning*. H regards how you *hook* and *hold* student interest. E stands for *events* that students *experience* during the unit (simulations, performance tasks, etc.). R urges us to build in opportunities for *reflection* and *rethinking* so that students dig deeper. The final E directs us to think about how the students will *exhibit* their understanding through performances and products. There's a lot here, and if you want, we have additional resources for each part of WHERE... just let Jeff know!

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

January 17, 2003

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Continuing on the theme of providing resources having to do with the planning of learning opportunities (stage 3), this article describes 10:2 Theory and the reasons for using it regularly in your instruction. There are two pieces of advice that are worthy of our consideration and embrace:

- Take time to activate prior learning and make real-life connections. Without connections, the chances of new learning is greatly reduced.
- For every ten minutes or so of meaningful chunks of new information, learners should be provided with two or so minutes to process information.

It's appropriate, now, with the ELA 8 test behind us, to catch our breath a bit and reflect. We can all agree that the tests aren't perfect, but they do encourage us to work together toward the common goal of improved student learning (reading, writing, and listening). That's not so bad, is it? Thanks to everyone for the Herculean efforts many people made to make things go smoothly this week and in the months prior. One down...

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff

Community Reading

January 31, 2003

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How are you doing on your standards-based (backward designed) unit? Hopefully, you have been able to make progress. The updates you provided give some indication of progress — there’s lots of great work being done in our school, *collaboratively*. Attached is the complete rubric we’ll use to assess the units this year. Previously, you’ve seen parts of it. Well, here’s the whole thing! It’s far from perfect, but we hope it is more closely aligned to our unit planning approach than the rubric we used last year. With just one glance you can see it mirrors the stages of backward design. We want to use the rubric twice. First, when rough drafts or preliminary plans are submitted, and then once when final plans are submitted. Each time, we’d like you (the authors) to use the rubrics to rate the unit; we’ll use the rubric to give feedback, too.

With regard to deadlines, here are our targets:

- Rough drafts/preliminary work submitted to Jeff by March 17th
- Final units submitted to Jeff by May 5th

There will be no community meeting on Tuesday, February 4th. Use that as work time. Also on the horizon, there should be some time on March 14th (Superintendents conference day). — perhaps as much as half the day. If we can help in any way, just holler!

-Mike, Marijo, and Jeff