**Coaching Protocols for Unit Maps: Lower Merion**

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**Making the School Mission Real**

A long standing understanding is that vibrant and effective learning organizations are driven by mission and not by compliance. A clearly statement declaring the driving purpose and goals of an institution is critical to galvanize professional practice. Mission statements should be shaped by specific tenets regarding what matters most for a specific group of learners in a specific setting. Pedagogy will be reflected in the statement’s notation of the relationship between teacher and learner and community.

Alignment to the mission must be evident in the curriculum maps. In a very real sense, the proof of commitment to the mission is demonstrated in learning plans, implementation, and targeted assessments.

A central tenet in mapping is that all school missions are to correspond to the students in the setting: their needs, their aspirations, and demographics. Certainly any mapping efforts must be dedicated to the learners to be served.

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Prompts-

—Do you have an actionable mission statement driving school decision making?

—Has every member of the faculty and staff had the opportunity to respond and to discuss the mission?

—Are the purposes of the mission operational in the curriculum map?

—What are the specific needs of the learners in your setting that are important to consider when laying out curriculum, instruction, and assessment?

 **External Alignment to Standards**

After targeted standards have been unwrapped, the

language of the standard should be directly translated into the map. The

curriculum makes the standard come alive in the classroom by creating

clear content, skills, and assessments that support and fulfill the mission

of the standard. The nouns and verbs that were unwrapped in the standard can be viewed by the corresponding content, skills, and assessments in the map.When working on consensus mapping, the scaffolding of more complex

maps can be clearly seen just as the standards become more complex.

It is important to note that standards are not curriculum but are proficiency targets. Each set of standards has unique structure and considerations. For example, the Common Core ELA standards are content free whereas Next Generation Science Standards are packed with concepts and critical content.

—Are the unwrapped standards evident in the map?

—Are the maps building in a scaffold year to year in a corresponding way to

the scaffold in the specific standards?



**Big Ideas**

A big idea is a relational statement that describes a key idea or understanding. The big idea points directly to the purpose for the unit the transferable concept. For

example in science, a big idea might be: “*In the natural world there are*

*systems composed of interdependent component parts*”. So, when

teaching the human anatomy in science, the curriculum should link all

content and factual material to the concept of the human body as a

system composed of interdependent component parts. If we do not use

a concept to initiate our content entries, then what we have are random

facts and disassociated pieces of knowledge.

Does the big idea get to the heart of the concept and purpose of your unit?

Is the big idea a complete sentence with power?

Will the big idea translate to an essential question?

**Essential Questions**

Essential questions embed the big idea into an interrogative form.

Thus the learner is set into a path of inquiry in pursuit of knowledge and

insight into the essential question. They take on the role of curriculum

chapters in that they organize and focus and frame not only the content

but the skills and assessment entered on the map. Reflecting the big

idea will serve to guide and to focus the learner. Essential questions are written directly for your specific student audience. We highly recommend **COLOR CODING** questions to match the big idea. This color coding method can filter throughout the map so that content, skills, and assessments will match the EQ. Again, this method supports, the notion of EQ’s as curriculum chapters.

Prompts:

—Is there a clear concept driving the question?

—Is it written for the targeted students as the audience?

—Can it organize and frame a set of classroom experiences?

—Is it essential for the students given their experiences K-12?

—Does is align with standards?

—If there is more than one question, are all of them necessary?

—Does it link and bind content, skills, and assessments on the maps

—Do the color coded EQ’s correspond one-to-one with the big idea source?

  **Detail on Content**

Content entries reflect the significant knowledge and information to which students will be exposed. Content choices should support the big idea. In short on a map content can be posted as bulleted, targeted content points with key facts, key

names, key events, and key points of knowledge to be addressed. There will be a preponderance of nouns listed in the content because of the nature of facts and information entries.

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Prompts:

—Does the content support a clearly stated big idea?

—Are the information and information points color coded back to the appropriate essential question?

\_\_\_Are the entries of significance?

—Is there sufficient information to have

a working sense of the focus of the unit or strand?

 **Precision Skills**

Skills are desired or targeted proficiencies and must commence with an

action verb with each entry. The specific action verb is necessary

because skills can only be taught and learned when they are observable

and assessable. The skill is strategically used by the student to

investigate and examine the content. The skill might also ask the student

to generate and to create in response to the content. Students need to

be clear what actions they are cultivating whether skills within disciplines

or cross-disciplinary in nature. Skills within a discipline reflect the

language used in standards as developed by state education departments

is presented in skill sets. Cross-disciplinary skills are characterized by

their applicability in an area of work such as literacy strategies or specific

study skills.

UPGRADE (new literacies + 21st century skills)

Is there a natural opportunity to upgrade the map with the insertion of a digital application?

——Is there a natural opportunity to replace a traditional formative assessment with a new media format?

—Might learners participate in a global outreach component in a map to connect with another location using media tools?

—Might learners explore a global perspective on the content being examined in a unit?

Prompts:

—Does each skill entry begin with a specific action verb?

—Do the skills make good sense as proficiencies to engage the learner

with the content?

—Is there sufficient time on the map to work on cultivating the skill?

**Targeted Assessments**

An assessment is a demonstration of learning thus it always takes the

form of either a tangible product or a temporal performance. An

assessment is something we can observe, so our entries must take the

form of a noun. The evidence of learning takes a form that will show the

learner’s progress or regress. Assessments must be presented in highly

precise language because vague or unclear generic entries do not help

describe the learner’s experience. If a teacher enters the word “quiz” as

an assessment, it is unclear what type of quiz, and the type makes a

difference. A ten-item multiple choice quiz requires far different skill sets

than a two paragraph constructed response quiz. Most important is that

the assessment is genuine evidence of how our students are acquiring

what we want them to know and be able to do.

School faculties need to agree as to whether they will separate formative and summative assessments on maps. Assessments can be refined and deepened by using guides such Webb’s DOK to determine the level of complexity of a task.

Wiggins and McTigh’s work in UbD on moving from practice to rehearsal

to authentic performance is another lens to view assessment design.

The assessment should align with targeted skills, the content, and the essential questions and big ideas. Clearly assessments are the demonstration of targeted

standards. These standards can be “bundled” from different standard sources. (For

example: some writing standards bundled with science standards).

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Prompts-

—Does the assessment align directly to the standard?

—Does the assessment provide observable evidence of the targeted

skills?

—Does the assessment provide evidence of the student’s knowledge of

the prescribed content?

—Is the assessment identified in a precise manner in a noun form?

—Is the choice of formative or summative assessment deliberate?

 **Developmental Focus** 

The primary focus of all of our efforts in creating curriculum maps is to

assist the specific learners in our care. We need to always check our work

to see if the developmental characteristics are evident in our curricular

choices. The stage and age of the learners is a central consideration.

Whether it is the highly concrete and sensory-motor needs of our

youngest learners or the complex and more abstract cognitive abilities

for our high school students, the maps need to correspond to those

qualities. What is more, there are inherent emotional and physical

considerations for each phase. A savvy teacher focuses the map to take

advantage of and to build on the exciting features of each age and stage

as well as wrestles with the challenges and limitations.

Prompts

—Do the maps reflect the specific needs of our specific students?

—Are all of the entries: content, skills, assessment, and essential

questions age appropriate?

—Are they engaging and motivating for the learner?

—Are issues of text complexity thoughtfully considered?

 **Internal Alignment**

In any composition, the elements need to correspond and support one

another. Whether it is a written composition, a musical composition, or a

curriculum map, we want to be sure that all elements support and reflect

the value of each of the others. THIS IS WHERE COLOR CODING is a

must! The whole is the sum of the parts. Thus, in examining entries on a map we not only want to see external alignment to the standard or to the mission statement, but internal alignment between the elements: content, skills, assessment, and

essential questions. Internal alignment also suggests that the map

aligns with those grade levels preceding and those that will follow. When

appropriate the map should work across a grade level and disciplines.

The design should be the best kind of “learning architecture”. The map is

a classroom planning blueprint.

Prompts

—Do the basic elements on the map align and support one another?

—Are there any elements disjointed from the whole?

—Has there been effective use of color coding to reflect corresponding choices

about the design of the unit.

Fundamental to designing curriculum and instruction is to deliberately consider the time in which the learner lives. When we look at our maps and they could have been planned for the last century, it reflects old habits and a lack of commitment to helping to prepare learners for the future. Maps need to be rigorously examined to find opportunities to “upgrade”, that is, replace dated content, skills, and assessments with contemporary alternatives. An emphasis on digital, media, and global literacy is at the basis of mapping revisions. Our students need to be employing digital applications, creating media products, and expanding their global perspectives actively. We support using the Curriculum 21 Clearinghouse <http://www.curriculum21.com/clearinghouse> as one sources for upgrading possibilities.