

# Touchstone

*Newsletter of the Basic School Eastern Consortia  
Housed at Virginia Tech, Falls Church, Virginia*



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## A Message from the Director

Several weeks ago I attended an information meeting for a new community performing arts center which will be built only ten minutes from my house. The center is a collaborative effort between George Mason University, the city of Manassas, and Prince William County, VA. As I listened to the presentation and saw the model, I thought of Ernest Boyer and how pleased he would be! The 1,100 seat theater and adjoining small venues have been designed specifically for community groups to perform. This includes the Prince William Symphony and Manassas Dance Company as well as high school productions. And there will be sets and costume design facilities for students in training. What a wonderful way to celebrate the arts.

This article by Elliott Eisner summarizes so well why we need the arts. Boyer would undoubtedly concur.

### *Ten Lessons The Arts Teach*

- (1) *The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships.*
- (2) *The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer.*
- (3) *The arts celebrate multiple perspectives.*
- (4) *The arts teach children that in*

*complex forms of problem solving, purposes are seldom fixed.*

- (5) *The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know.*
- (6) *The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects.*
- (7) *The arts teach students to think through and within a material.*
- (8) *The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said.*
- (9) *The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source.*
- (10) *The arts' position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important.*

Check out the entire article at:

<http://naea-reston.org/tenlessons.html>

In this issue of Touchstone we begin a series on how the Basic School “fits” with other best practices in education. We hope you enjoy these articles.

-Judith Smith

## SAVE THIS DATE!

**Summer Institute 2006  
July 28-30, 2006**

**Crystal City Marriott  
Arlington, VA**

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## Understanding by Design: A Basic School “Fit”

Dr. Boyer poignantly stated that a Curriculum with Coherence is, in part, “...based upon shared human experiences, [which] integrate the traditional subjects, helping students see connections across the disciplines and relate what they learn to life.” In this age of intense accountability I am convinced that had Dr. Boyer been with us today, he would whole-heartedly embrace the tenets of Understanding by Design (UbD) as a simple, yet profound framework for constructing coherence in our teaching, connections in our learning, and a richness in student understanding that gives increased purpose and validity to the Core Commonalities.



Understanding by Design is the research work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, published and facilitated through the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Their work develops the “Backward Design” Framework for instruction design and delivery which, in practice, is standards-based, focused on increasing student achievement, and aimed at making meaningful connections for life-based learning. It is also counter-intuitive, meaning that while the framework makes a great

deal of sense, it is not the second nature to the planning practices that many teachers presently use.



UbD calls upon teachers to think like “assessors” rather than “activity planners.” Typically, we teachers begin our planning processes with books, materials and time-honored lessons or units. We consider topics of study and proceed to planning the learning activities or events that will help the topic or concept play out. We are activity planners. McTighe and Wiggins propose a “backward” design process in which we as teachers begin, as Stephen Covey would say, “with the end in mind.” Backward Design begins with identifying the end result of learning, proceeds with our determining what *exactly* it is that will provide evidence of such learning, and, only *then* do we move forward with the development, planning and implementation of classroom learning activities.

We begin at stage one with goals derived directly from our standards, and *identify the desired results* for students – what they will know, understand, and be able to do with that understanding. It is here that important connections to the Core Commonalities can be made. At this stage we seek to identify what understandings are *enduring* and connected to the learner’s life. We

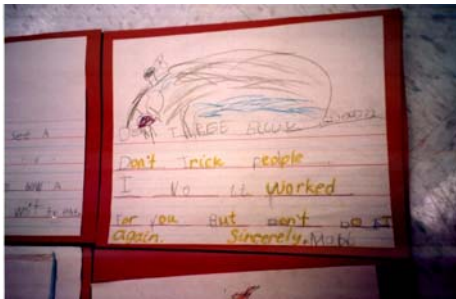
also seek to create *essential questions*, the provocative questions that will lead student inquiry and whose answers are worth pursuing. Through enduring understandings and essential questions, teachers identify specific knowledge and skills that are needed for effective student performance.

At stage two, teachers *determine acceptable evidence* which will indicate that learning and transfer has taken place. Teachers ask themselves how they will know if a student has achieved the desired results and met specific content standards. How will students demonstrate that they **REALLY** understand the big ideas? Teachers consider many and varied ways of collecting evidence, which includes typical tests and quizzes, but also incorporates performance tasks through which a student can apply and demonstrate his/her understanding in a real situation.



Finally, in stage three, the teacher *plans the learning experiences and instruction*. At stage three, having the intended results of learning and appropriate evidence in mind, the teacher crafts what he/she will do to insure that students gain understanding. What will be taught? Coached? How should it best be taught? What

performance will illuminate the student learning? How will students be engaged?



Our schools use the Backward Design framework to construct learning units around the “big ideas” of life. During an all-school study of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, our planning took on a whole new direction from typical literature studies during the holidays when we posed questions for inquiry to students at various levels. “What makes a life worth living?” “What is our responsibility to others?” “How do we define true generosity?” With abundant evidence of virtues throughout the literature, we were able to make many connections to Living with a Purpose and other Commonalities. It is easy to begin a literature study, especially during the holidays, with a myriad of “activities.” The Backward Design process lends itself to supporting a teacher’s thoughtful thinking and planning to identify purposeful academic goals from which to work. The culminating performance task, which involved the essential questions, led to the creation of a Dickens Museum for which the students were the curators.

Similarly, in the Social Studies, historical perspective on topics such as national conflict can take on new meaning and depth. The American Revolution is important to know, but more as a context for understanding about the nature of “revolution.” “What is revolution?” “How does

revolution bring about change?” Framing history in such questions can support students in making powerful connections to the need for revolution around them. Consider the brewing backyard revolution occurring in your fourth grade taking over the basketball court and not allowing the third grade to play. The sense of injustice felt by third graders can set the stage for revolution study and conflict problem solving linked to other defining moments in our history. What performance task would you create to bring together learning and application in this scenario?

Backward Design is simple, and yet profound. Its stages are logical, but they ask us, as teachers, to work against habits. Just as the Core Commonalities are a new lens through which to view our curriculum, UbD is a new lens through which to view our planning process. In the end, we come to grips with the reality of modern teaching: *we are paid to think!* The whole process of teaching for understanding is the essence of Boyer’s vision that in learning, we help each student to build their life, and their life of learning, as if it were a work of art.

-By Patrick Callaghan

*Patrick Callaghan is Executive Director of Elementary Education for the South-Western City Schools, Grove City, Ohio. He is a regular workshop presenter at the Basic School Summer Institute and is a member of the Basic School Eastern Consortia Stakeholders Advisory Board.*

## Ernest Boyer On The Arts

*“Weaving the arts through the whole Basic School Curriculum, and giving more focused time to art instruction, as well, profoundly enriches students’ lives and stimulates their minds. In the Basic School, instructional time is set aside for art, just as for English and math.*

-Ernest Boyer  
(1997, p. 78)

## Welcome PS 253



We welcome PS 253 in Far Rockaway, NY as a new member of the Eastern Consortia. PS 253 opened as a new school in 2004-2005. Principal Robin Johnson is no stranger to the Basic School as she worked with John Quattrocchi at PS 43 around the corner. Robin and her teachers have attended the Summer Institute and are now great supporters of the Basic School.

<b>BASIC SCHOOL EASTERN CONSORTIA</b> <b>MEMBERSHIP 2005-06</b>
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**CONSORTIA STAFF**

**MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS**

Dr. Judith Smith  
Director

*Regular School Membership . . . . . \$179.00*  
**Includes**

Dr. Ray Van Dyke  
Associate Director

Newsletter: Eight issues featuring member schools and their best practices, updates on the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Summer Institute, messages from the Director

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Director of Field Operations

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*Comprehensive School Membership . . . . . \$795.00*  
**\$895.00 Value - Includes all of the above PLUS**

Dr. Mary Ellen Bafumo  
Senior Advisor

Registration for Four People for the Fall Basic School Workshop in North Carolina

*Individual Membership. . . . . \$79.00*  
**Designed for University/Central Office Personnel**  
**Includes Newsletter and Workshop Information**

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**  
**BASIC SCHOOL EASTERN CONSORTIA 2005-2006**

\_\_\_\_\_ OR \_\_\_\_\_  
School Individual

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address City/State Zip Code

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Telephone FAX

\_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Person Telephone Email

Type of Membership:  
Regular School (\$179.00) \_\_\_\_\_  
Comprehensive School (\$795.00) \_\_\_\_\_  
Individual (\$79.00) \_\_\_\_\_

Mail application and check payable to:  
VA Tech Basic School Network  
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center  
7054 Haycock Rd., Falls Church, VA 22043



## *Basic School Eastern Consortia*

Basic School Eastern Consortia :  
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**"Educating students to their full potential . . ."**

### **Basic School Fall Workshop: A Huge Success**

Nineteen participants convened at David Cox Road Elementary on November 18, 2005 for a first hand look at a Basic School in action, a workshop presentation, and networking with colleagues from Georgia to New York!

We were inspired to see math and literacy centers, writer's workshops, buddies collaborating, and a music and art teacher who co-teach a first grade class (and they even integrated literacy!). In the afternoon Mr. Nusinov treated us to a math integration workshop in which we all realized how to make an aerodynamic paper airplane AND how to find out why that is so!

Our round table discussion at the end of the day helped us all see that, though we are from diverse schools, we are all dealing with the same things. Perhaps the participants say it best:

*The entire day was wonderful. It was very well thought out and planned with just enough time allotted for each activity.*

*I got a lot out of the Making Math Meaningful workshop. The variety of literature and ideas were helpful.*

Thank you David Cox Road!

### **Thank You School Renewals**

We thank the following schools for their prompt membership renewal in the Eastern Consortia.

If your school name does not appear below, be sure to send in your dues to the Eastern Consortia in order to receive the monthly newsletter and Summer Institute information.

- Alton Darby
- Berryhill
- Capshaw
- Children's Community
- Christiansburg
- Colegio Americano de Puebla
- Cornerstone Learning Community
- David Cox Road
- F.M. Kearns Primary
- Hoffman Trails
- Kipps
- Lake Seneca
- Lincoln
- Longfellow
- Mantua
- Monterey
- Morgan
- North Hamilton County
- P.S. 7
- PS 43
- P.S. 225
- P.S. 253
- Price's Fork
- Skyview
- South Side
- St. Lucie
- Summit Charter
- Westlawn