

**Final Report
Media Group
Center for Teaching and Learning
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| Name of text | <i>Disciplines as Frameworks for Student Learning: Teaching the Practice of the Disciplines</i> | |

This media group met during the spring semester to discuss the book *Disciplines as Frameworks for Student Learning: Teaching the Practice of the Disciplines*. We started reading the book in December over break and met on January 20, February 8, and May 4 to discuss each of the book's three sections. Each meeting lasted at least two hours.

This book is a collection of essays from professors across the liberal arts disciplines at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The essays are "intellectual autobiographies" that trace the authors' reflections on and changes in their teaching and disciplinary practices. Specifically, all of Alverno College's faculty structure their curriculum around the idea of disciplines as frameworks for student learning. The authors raise questions useful for us to consider here at MUM, questions that ask what students should know and be able to do as a result of study in our classrooms. The main premise of the book asserts that in undergraduate education we are always working with developmental stages in our students, and the most effective teaching examines what these developmental stages look like in our own disciplines.

Our media group consisted of faculty from across disciplines: mathematics, English, chemistry, history, and philosophy. Each of these disciplines was represented by a chapter in the book, a reflection on actual teaching practices by a professor in one of these disciplines, a practice that addresses the developmental stages of his/her students' learning in the specific discipline. The liberal education plan at Alverno was ability-based; this encouraged us to have specific goals and measurable outcomes for our own courses. However, many of their courses stressed the process of learning and did not require the quantity of learning usually demanded in a survey course or a nationally-defined majors' course. The authors' approach lost credibility due to this discrepancy from our reality. We reflected on our own teaching, shared our perspectives on teaching outside our disciplines, and considered whether and how Miami Middletown might systematically align curriculum with this emphasis on developmental learning for all students.

The discussions began with the text but branched quickly into application at MUM, our own approach, and how the campus culture supports (or does not support) ability-based outcomes. As Angela Yesh stated, “I got the most out of where it’s taken me—what it got me to think about—rather than what the book said.” Interestingly, all but one of us did not like the chapter concerning our own discipline. While many interesting ideas were presented, we each felt the specifics of our discipline could not be directly applied here at Middletown because the systemic application was missing and a minimum content must be presented.

Two major ideas guided our discussion for using disciplines as frameworks for student learning. One is “the creation of connected webs of knowledge out of discrete data” as one aspect of expert problem solving (page 31). The second concerns the universality of certain cognitive processes: seeking patterns, using models, developing specialized vocabulary, understanding that numbers are relative to context, and connecting abstractions to real-world experiences (page 97). Although these ideas were presented under mathematics and chemistry, we felt they can be useful across the curriculum.

Outcomes from this reading group include wanting to start a learning community to implement ideas sparked here. As a group, we agreed to focus on helping students create connected webs of knowledge as a way to seek patterns in the discrete facts they are learning. We will also focus on specialized vocabulary and applying abstraction to real world application. Each discipline will use these cognitive processes in their classes; we will compare how well the students learn while using them. Paired peer evaluation of teaching with reciprocal class visits was also considered for the fall semester. We would like to meet regularly as a learning community to touch base on how well these ideas are being implemented.

Our reading group project supported the CTL’s mission in a number of ways: Our focus was to improve teaching in our classrooms through a collaborative effort across the disciplines. By reading descriptions of other professors’ teaching practices—practices informed by a theoretical perspective on the developmental nature of all learning—and then thinking through how this perspective could inform our own teaching practice, we engaged in a scholarly approach to teaching. Further, our inquiry has stimulated ideas for strengthening our teaching and students’ learning at Miami University Middletown.