

Curriculum Mapping

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Imagine yourself in a major city here in the U.S. It's late at night and you're looking for your hotel. You're sitting in your rental car looking for that map they gave you at the counter only to remember you left it on the counter. So, you're lost looking for a Motel 6, hoping they left the light on for you. This is the equivalent of a small charter, parochial or private school going into the field of education without a curriculum map.

Curriculum mapping is the means by which a school decides within a particular discipline what will be taught, in what sequence, how it will be assessed and what some of the best practices in teaching the subject matter may be. What is commonplace amongst small charter, private, or parochial schools is that you have individual teachers creating his or her own plan for the year, which takes from precious planning time. So the proverbial snowball starts rolling. The area next affected by this are the students because they benefit from a good presentation of the material. Then the parents suffer because their child is struggling to do their homework, which is already taking away from family time. In a lot of cases the parent cannot help the child with his or her homework. The last group to be affected will be the board members and administrators who are the people that can alleviate the problem by insisting that the school operate with curriculum maps.

Curriculum maps operate in three functions. The first is communication. If at any time the parents want to know where the students are in terms of learning they are able to do so by looking at the map. For example, if you have a new parent and they inquire as to what the students are learning or have learned up to this point it is very easy to show

them. This eliminates the disorganization that many small schools are accused of because they don't have the organizational structure that larger districts have. Curriculum maps also serve as communication between teachers as well. Cross-curriculum opportunities are abundant when teachers know at the beginning of the school year generally where they are going to be at a specific point in the school year. So if the History teacher is going to be teaching WWII in January and the Language Arts teacher knows this, he or she can choose a text that can assist the History instructor instead of him/her trying to shove a lot of different types of information on the students. For example, the Language Arts instructor could choose the book *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which would coincide with the time frame the History teacher is teaching. This would assist both instructors in the sense that the students would already have background information. This makes teaching easier while at the same time building a feeling of teamwork amongst the staff. This is always a positive thing, as the late President Lyndon Johnson said, "There are no problems we cannot solve together and very few that we can solve by ourselves." It also serves as a means of communicating with the students. Students are more comfortable when there is a plan of action and they know there is a goal. Then their attitude is one of assuredness and, in education as well as in life, attitude is the difference between success and failure. As author J. Sidlow Baxter wrote, "What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude towards it. Every opportunity has a difficulty and every difficulty has an opportunity."

The second function of curriculum maps is to give the meat and potatoes of instruction. These involve Content, Skills, Best Practices, and Assessment tools. Content is what information will be taught. Skills are the necessary tools that are needed

to achieve what is being taught and what the student will have after the information is taught. Best practices are what have been found to be the best way to teach material, where the information is processed by the student at a greater capacity. Assessment is the means by which competency is measured. This is the way the student will show what he/she has learned.

The third function of curriculum maps is organization of the school year. Teachers plan a student-centered curriculum. Curriculum maps are flexible and can be modified according to students' strengths and weaknesses. Any education that is not student-centered is not education. One of the things that parents who are looking for a school to put their child in talk about is how well organized it seems. What school leaders need to remember is that parents are entrusting us with their most prized possession - their children. This is a great responsibility and needs to be taken seriously.

The benefits of curriculum mapping are many, however I will highlight three. The first benefit is structure. Without structure, no building, purpose, organization, or human being will be successful. Curriculum maps give a structure for what is going to be taught, when it will be taught, and in what sequence it will be taught. This gives a structural base from which everything else can flow. Every instructor would have a blueprint to work from and would know exactly what is expected from him or her. People perform better when they know what is expected from them.

The second benefit is flexibility. Curriculum maps are living documents that can be changed and modified to fit the students. One of the hallmarks of a good classroom is that it is flexible. You cannot deal with 20-30 people and expect it to always go as planned. Having a curriculum map doesn't mean that everything has to be covered; it is

the goal of what you want to accomplish. “A people with no vision will perish.”

The last benefit is knowing the best practices in conveying the information. Teaching has been around for thousands of years. Using those practices that have been the most successful is essential to success as a teacher and an institution. Education has become the one area where we have disregarded its history. When we were producing people who created the sciences, mathematics, philosophy, and psychology, we were using best practices. We have to get back to our roots and study and implement those practices that have been time tested and approved.

In summary, curriculum mapping is an essential tool in the creation and sustainability of any good educational institution. It gives the school credibility through organization, teamwork, structure, student-driven and centered curriculum, and flexibility. The process of curriculum mapping involves the staff and administration with the student in mind. The state and accreditation standards are gathered and evaluated along with the material on hand in order to effectively create a curriculum map that fits not only the subject but the institution as well. .