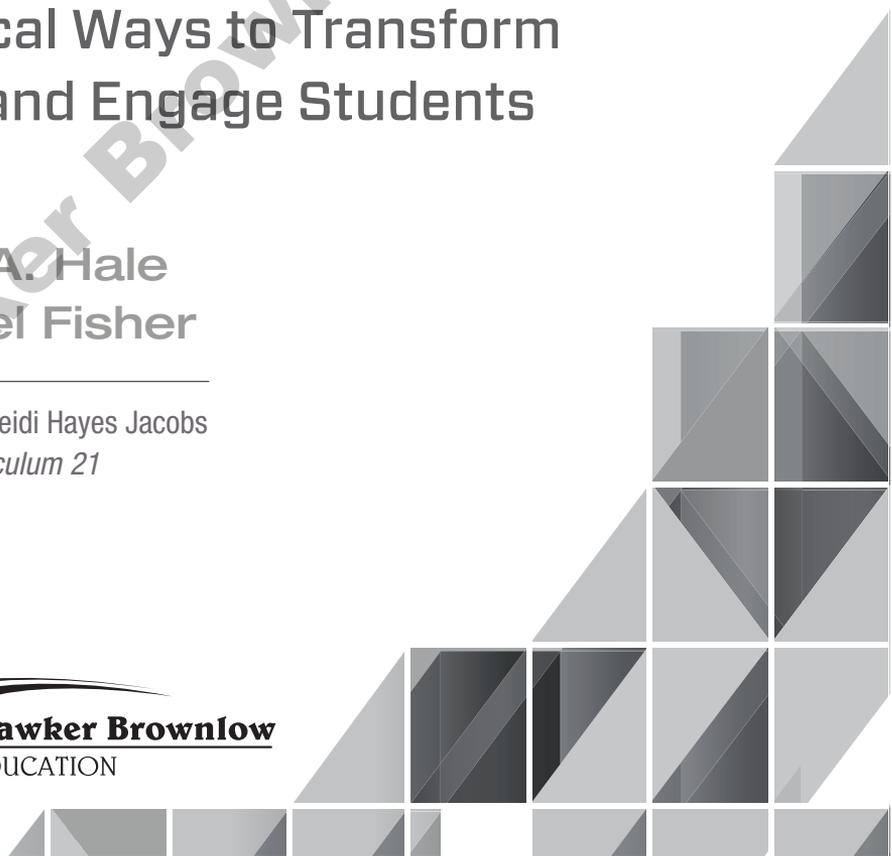


Upgrade Your Curriculum

Practical Ways to Transform Units and Engage Students

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Foreword

In *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World* (2010), I developed the phrase “upgrading curriculum” in the hope that each teacher in every school would formally agree to strategically replacing a dated unit with a new practice. I believe that Janet Hale and Mike Fisher have “upgraded” upgrading. They have taken this key concept and created a detailed set of implementation steps to ensure that the learning trajectory of our students goes sky-high into the future.

If schools are launching pads, then Hale and Fisher are asking us to take a hard look at the planned trajectory of teaching and learning. If we view curriculum and assessment choices as indicators of the direction in which our students are heading, most of us would have to agree that we are preparing them to travel back in time to the 20th century. I have found that most educators want to create contemporary learning experiences, but they need to know how and where to start. *Upgrade Your Curriculum: Practical Ways to Transform Units and Engage Students* is a powerful resource that will guide teachers, principals, professional developers, and district leaders in these efforts.

As active collaborators and imaginative practitioners, Hale and Fisher have served up a 21st century curriculum feast for readers who sit at their table. Through their collaborative efforts, they have both expanded and refined the menu for improving the classroom lives of students and teachers. The expansion is evidenced through engaging case studies (Hale and Fisher call them “transformational snapshots”) that reflect how real educators in specific settings have modernized units of study. These

examples are marvelously personal, not only because the authors' writing style is so accessible but also because these stories are authentic. Hale and Fisher are two of the most vibrant and committed educators I know. They draw from a wealth of professional development experiences in schools across the United States and overseas. I have no doubt that the details of each snapshot will ring true, whether that snapshot focuses on enlivening a social justice unit, engaging primary-level learners with Flat Stanley gone global, or giving a math teacher a set of ten-frames to deepen students' understanding. A key feature of the snapshots is their creative applications of digital and media tools, thoughtfully organized based on a planning process that leads us to appraise and brainstorm, commit and communicate, react and reflect, and revise.

In addition to expanding the menu, the authors have also refined it. This refinement is evident in what I believe will prove a touchstone to the field: their *transformational matrix*. A dynamic and precise set of planning markers, this model provides a professional handrail to hold onto as we make the challenging transition from past practice to new versions of schooling. The matrix is timely given that we are in the midst of a confluence of messages regarding accountability, the Common Core State Standards, teacher effectiveness, and student performance. Yet overarching all these messages is the reality that we are now in the second decade of a new century that is requiring us to collectively step up curriculum in terms of both learning and teaching. Making this transition is daunting, and our schools need help in becoming contemporary institutions. It is reassuring to have this book in our hands and on our tablets.

On a personal level, it is a privilege to call Janet and Mike my colleagues and my friends. They are highly respected members of our Curriculum 21 faculty and can always be called on to step up and assist another teammate at the drop of a hat. Their work ethic is consistently rigorous, their sincere commitment to students is unquestionable, and their love of our work is contagious. I continue to learn from each of them as individuals, but in this foreword I want to particularly honor their collaboration. As you read this book, you will see how strongly they believe in communication and networking among professionals as crucial to quality transformation. In these pages, they have worked together to model what they preach through this dynamic and exciting opportunity to *upgrade your curriculum*.

Heidi Hayes Jacobs

The Curriculum 21 Project

www.curriculum21.com

Introduction

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

—Helen Keller

Have you ever had a chance meeting with someone who ended up dramatically influencing your life? This was the case with us. Janet was hired to aid a district in its curriculum mapping initiative. Mike was working for a local educational service center and had been asked to attend the district training day as a technology specialist for the district's mapping software.

Janet: During lunch, a few teachers and administrators, Mike, and I sat around a table and discussed everything from educational issues and current events to favorite movies and childhood experiences. I found Mike knowledgeable regardless of the topic, but most of all, I found him funny. He told a childhood story that literally made me laugh out loud.

Mike: When I first met Janet on the training day, I had been involved in curriculum mapping initiatives, but I primarily focused on the technology. Honestly, I felt intimidated by her knowledge of mapping. I had no idea at the time that she felt intimidated by my knowledge of technology and web-based tools.

About two weeks after the training day, I (Janet) read an online cartoon that reminded me of Mike's humorous childhood memoir. I e-mailed the cartoon to

Mike, and our friendship began. We started e-mailing each other frequently for educational purposes. We discussed curriculum mapping, standards-based learning, instructional practices, and educational news. We began to co-present at various conferences, including ASCD's Annual Conference and the Curriculum Mapping Institute sponsored by Heidi Hayes Jacobs and Curriculum 21 (www.curriculum21.com).

We discovered over time that we enjoyed similar television shows and movies. When Disney released the movie *Up*, we quickly identified with two of the main characters: Carl and Dug. Carl, an elderly gentleman who can be a bit of a curmudgeon, is set in his ways and likes his routines. Dug is a dog who is valuable when accomplishing a task but often “squirrels,” or gets off track easily. We decided that Janet is Carl and Mike is Dug. We can joke in this manner because over time we have become aware of our respective strengths and weaknesses and have used this knowledge to create a healthy partnership.

Our movie character metaphor reminds us that a healthy working relationship is built on mutual trust and respect and the ability to be vulnerable and depend on each other. Our collaboration in writing this book has further solidified our friendship and made us stronger as professionals.

We are sharing this information with you because collaboration is crucial in the 21st century. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) clearly lay out the expectation that students must become proficient collaborators during their educational journeys, from their formative years to college and the workplace (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010a). It follows that everyone involved in creating modern-learning environments for our current and future generations must participate in collaborative efforts.

In this book, we explain how teachers and administrators can upgrade their schools' current curriculum and recalibrate instructional practices to embrace modern learning. In modern-learning environments, students participate collaboratively in higher-order thinking tasks that often make local and global connections (and global impacts—more on these later) and include appropriate technology and web-based tools. We provide descriptions of the collaborative transformational process and in-the-field classroom experiences as well as specific strategies that emphasize student engagement and ownership of learning.

The seeds of *Upgrade Your Curriculum* are rooted deeply in Heidi Hayes Jacobs's *Curriculum 21* (2010). Jacobs explains:

New essential curriculum will need revision—actual replacements of dated content, skills, and assessments with more timely choices. The steps and strategies presented here can focus a faculty on *upgrading* specific elements of the existing curriculum with more engaging and powerful selections. It is a nonthreatening approach that can be worked into the school culture gradually. Rather than a change model, it is a growth model. (pp. 12–13, italics added)

The upgrade concepts shared throughout *Curriculum 21* caused us to expand our personal and collaborative work to empower and enable teachers to successfully upgrade, or transform, units of study. We articulate specifics related to Jacobs's upgrading concepts throughout Part 1. In Chapter 3, we share the 21st Century Pledge that Jacobs created with teachers who were embarking on their upgrading journey.

We based *Upgrade Your Curriculum* on the premise that moving from *me* to *we* is an ongoing and essential process. Slow-and-steady upgrades or transformations, in which teachers (and students) work collaboratively to make strategic and specific modifications to current curricular elements, lead to modern, meaningful, and engaging experiences. We have found that once a collaborative culture is in place, participating in curriculum transformation continues to have positive effects on both teachers and students.

Book Overview

Part 1 of this book addresses the foundational concepts involved in transforming current curriculum for modern-learning environments. These four chapters explain the transformational matrix and its four zones, the five transformational lenses educators should use to focus on curriculum design, ways to purposefully and authentically incorporate technology and web-based tools into the curriculum, and the four phases of the transformational process.

Part 2 shows how various practitioners have used the transformational process to upgrade their curriculum and instructional practices. The nine narratives in these chapters include a range of grade levels and subject areas. The following list classifies each narrative, or *snapshot*, by school level:

Elementary School

Chapter 5: Ten-Frame Mathematics

Chapter 6: Flat Stanley Podcast

Chapter 7: Talk Pals

Middle School

Chapter 8: Microloans: A Glocal Impact

Chapter 9: Film Festival

Chapter 10: Social Justice Live!

High School

Chapter 11: Science in the Cloud

Chapter 12: Pinterest Art Critiques

Administration

Chapter 13: Common Core State Standards

Professional Development

Whichever your own subject area or grade level, we recommend reading all nine snapshots to get a full picture of the collaborative transformation of units of study. Each transformational snapshot includes three discussion questions to spark conversation among you and your colleagues.

The two short chapters in Part 3 consist of our own reflections—Janet’s in Chapter 14 and Mike’s in Chapter 15.

Finally, the Appendix includes 12 *TECHformational matrices*, or visual aids to be used as conversation starters by teachers and administrators as they consider potential technology-based transformations. Whereas the transformational matrix described in Chapter 1 focuses on overall student learning and engagement, the *TECHformational matrices* focus specifically on technology and web-based tools’ potential to increase student engagement and ownership of learning. We have divided the *TECHformational matrices* into three categories: digital devices, web-based tools, and curations.