
*Mapping the Big Picture:
Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K-12*

About the Author vi

1 The Need for Calendar-Based Curriculum Mapping 1

2 Procedures for Curriculum Mapping 7

3 Reviewing, Analyzing, and Developing Curriculum Maps 17

4 Refining the Map Through Essential Questions 25

5 Using Mapping to Generate Developmental Assessment 35

6 A Case for Eliminating Curriculum Committees 41

7 Practitioners Talk About Making Maps 49

Bibliography 59

Appendix I: Questions and Answers About Curriculum Mapping 61

Appendix II: Sample Essential Questions 65

Appendix III: Sample Curriculum Maps 69

About the Author

Heidi Hayes Jacobs has served as an educational consultant to numerous schools and educational organizations nationally and internationally. She has been an adjunct associate professor of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, since 1981. Her book *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation* has been a bestseller for ASCD. Her work is featured in various video series and numerous professional journals. Her doctoral work was completed at Columbia University's Teachers College in 1981. She lives with her husband and two children in Westchester County, New York. You may reach her at the e-mail address below.

Curriculum Designers, Inc.

e-mail: curricdes@aol.com

1

The Need for Calendar-Based Curriculum Mapping

In the fall of 1988, I was asked to work with a New Jersey school district to help refine their curriculum articulation and integration. In a conversation with a 7th grade team, I asked, "What will you actually be teaching this year?" The English teacher smiled and responded, "You mean what will each of us actually be doing tomorrow?" I thought for a moment and answered, "Well, at least let's get an idea about September, October, and so on. How can we integrate the curriculum if we don't know what it is?"

At this point the building principal interjected, "But we do have our district curriculum guides." The science teacher looked skeptical: "Yes, but those aren't necessarily accurate. They are guidelines, but they are not exactly what we work on in class."

We began to lay out the year's plan on index cards across a library table, and one truth became evident. The one thing that the English, social studies, science, math, foreign language, technology, and art teachers had in common was September, October, and November. Each had to deal with the Gregorian calendar. And it became

plain to me that by using the school calendar, the teachers could begin to create a realistic picture of their program in a clear, practical fashion.

Teachers always have used the school year calendar to make their plans. But in the past they have not had the technology to collect real-time information about the actual curriculum including content, skills, and assessment data. After my New Jersey experience, I began asking teaching teams at the elementary, middle, and high school level to try using the school calendar to collect basic information about their curriculum plans such as unit titles, projects, and materials. The response was consistently positive. Not only did people find the calendar an honest vehicle for communication about the curriculum, but they reported it was far more efficient than reading through lists of curriculum guidelines from other departments.

In October 1991, I wrote a short article for *Educational Leadership* on calendar-based mapping and received a strong response from around the country asking how to commence work on maps (Jacobs 1991). In the ASCD video *Integrated Curriculum* (1993), one of the segments shows a group of teachers creating curriculum maps. This sparked even more phone calls and faxes about how to do “this mapping thing.” I decided that the concept needed more field research and scrutiny.

In the past few years, I have spent many hours with faculties around the country compiling the suggestions and successes summarized in this book. I have communicated with leading educators such as Mike Eisenberg (see Eisenberg and Johnson 1996), who demonstrates the value of using maps to inject information processing skills into the core curriculum, and Bena Kallick (see Costa and Kallick 1995), who solidly supports the notion of the “critical friend” and views mapping as a staff development opportunity for quality communication about curricular renewal.

It is now completely clear that educators can construct useful maps in just a few hours each school year, and these maps can change as often as needed to revise or reorder the curriculum. This book explains how to begin that task.

Why Map at All?

Though teachers may work together in the same building for years, they usually have sketchy knowledge about what goes on in each other's classrooms. High school teachers on the same corridor have no clue as to their colleagues' books, concepts, and assignments. A middle school team may work diligently on its specific program but have limited information about any other team in the building. Elementary schools can be nurturing environments but fundamentally a collection of one-room schoolhouses.

If there are gaps among teachers within buildings, there are virtual Grand Canyons among buildings in a district. It is rare to find a high school teacher who is knowledgeable about the middle school curriculum or elementary and middle school teachers who are in close communication about their students. The reality is an occasional "transition" meeting between feeding and receiving schools where cursory information is passed on, though with the best of intentions. All too often, curriculum decisions are made in a vacuum.

With so little real-time data available, we find two polarized tendencies. One is to become rigid and lock step with curriculum guides, giving the impression that all is under control. The second is to become so loose and vague that no one seems to have a clue as to what is going on.

To make sense of our students' experiences over time, we need two lenses: a zoom lens into this year's curriculum for a particular grade and a wide-angle lens to see the K-12 perspective. The classroom (or micro) level is dependent on the site and district level (a macro view).

Though the micro and macro levels are connected throughout a district, there is a conspicuous lack of macro-level data for decision making. Yet we need that big picture for each student's journey through his or her years of learning. With data from curriculum mapping, a school and its feeding and receiving sites can review and revise the curriculum within a larger, much-needed context. Data on the curriculum

map can be examined both horizontally through the course of any one academic year and vertically over the student's K-12 experience.

In the past we relied on curriculum committees to provide the larger perspective. It is my contention that old-styled curriculum committees should be dismantled and replaced. Site-based curriculum councils creating curriculum maps with computers should focus on the most basic level of the students' experience in the individual school. District curriculum cabinets representing all the schools should meet periodically, taking on the role of a coordinating body akin to the editor-in-chief of a publishing house. These ideas are developed in Chapter 6 with details of specific roles and responsibilities.

We need to change the process used in making curriculum decisions because most curriculum committees are ineffective at actually producing work that directly affects student performance. Curriculum committees usually come together to formulate lists of objectives, skills, and concepts that are optimum goals for teachers to implement. Occasionally these lists inspire and focus teachers' actions, but too often they remain nothing more than lifeless inventories of isolated skills. The lists may discuss 1st grade writing skills or 3rd grade reading skills, but they offer little or no focus on precisely when specific skills will be addressed during the course of a school year, let alone a group of school years.

Without a commitment to *when* a skill will be taught, there is no commitment. Furthermore, skills are not taught in a vacuum. They are addressed in application to content, and they are evidenced in a product or performance by the learner. In short, though committees anguish over the skill list, most end up with the feeling that it is not a useful document. As one teacher put it, "There is a sense of let's get through this, because they're making us." District-level educators become all the more frustrated when the skill list is filed away, and no one really knows if and how the skills are used.

No teacher or administrator is to blame for this situation. None of us chooses to make the absence of efficient or effective communication a reality. It has long been