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Definition, Purpose, and Observations

CURRICULUM YEAR OVERVIEW DEFINITION

A Curriculum Year Overview (CYO), or curriculum mapping document, as the name implies, maps everything—in all subject areas—that a teacher needs to cover in a given school year. The CYO accounts for all the content standards the district or state mandates, along with information that personalizes the document for each teacher. This can include resources (such as school-adopted textbooks, a teacher’s favorite trade or picture books, software, and so on), interdisciplinary connections, culminating projects or other assessments, guiding questions for the unit, skills to be taught, and so forth. For most elementary school teachers, the CYO must be comprehensive, for it takes into account several subject areas for a self-contained classroom. On the other hand, since a middle or high school teacher is responsible for only one or two subject areas—such as social studies, science, a core class of language arts, social studies, or a similar configuration—the CYO will reflect this. In Chapter 4 are numerous sample CYOs for primary through high school. For some, there is a “year-at-a-glance,” which is a list of the representative topics, units of study, skills, and so forth, to provide a cursory look at the school year. All sample CYOs include a comprehensive map of selected monthly units. Participants are directed to these samples at a designated time in the step-by-step process featured in Chapter 2.

Please keep in mind, however, that no two Curriculum Year Overviews will look exactly alike, even for the same grade where students are expected to abide by the same content standards for a school, district, or state. Why? Because teachers have diverse students, use different textbooks and resources, and possess individual teaching styles. The samples included in this book are meant to provide guidance, a starting point, and ideas for content and format as you facilitate an exercise and collaborate with teachers to create a personalized CYO. When the

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curriculum map is crafted, in addition to mapping standards, identifying skills and assessments, and so forth, it will reflect each teacher's personal flair and individuality, because an essential element of teaching comes from teachers' passion for their profession. Teachers may express their individuality through referencing an effective resource book that is just right, grouping standards in a specific way, citing the perfect piece of art to illustrate a concept, identifying a unique authentic assessment, or naming the guest speaker who enhances learning.

PURPOSES OF A CURRICULUM YEAR OVERVIEW

There are many reasons to create a CYO or curriculum map. Here are some that have inspired me, but you could most likely add to this list your own purposes, which I may have inadvertently omitted. Following this list is an explanation of each purpose, based on my experience working with numerous teacher groups. A CYO can:

1. Provide an outline for the school year.
2. Validate teaching to standards and accountability to using standards as a guide.
3. Identify skills and concepts embedded in standards and craft guiding questions.
4. Reference culminating unit assessments.
5. Provide a comprehensive listing of available resources and materials.
6. Allow for support and consistency in a grade level and foster teamwork.
7. Promote articulation from grade to grade.
8. Serve as a marketing and communications tool.

You might exclaim, "A Curriculum Year Overview does all that?" Well, that is completely up to the teacher group who chooses to create a CYO. I realize that other curriculum maps may address some of these purposes or additional ones. However, for my clients, I propose everything that a Curriculum Year Overview can become. Teachers then decide how comprehensive they want it to be, based on the time they have available, the effort they choose to put into it, the number of subjects they teach and wish to include in the document, the way in which the CYO will be used, and their target audiences (for example, current teachers, future teachers, community members, administrators, and so on).

PURPOSE EXPLANATIONS

Provide an Outline for the School Year

The foremost reason to create a CYO is to provide teachers with a complete outline of what is taught from September to June (or year-round, if the school

is configured that way). A seemingly overwhelming number of state or district standards must be covered, so laying out the standards in a way that parallels how teachers deliver curriculum—by thoughtfully placing each standard in a time and situation that has meaning—can assist these professionals in doing their jobs. Additionally, in a CYO teachers not only map content standards, but use them to develop guiding questions, skills, and assessments for curriculum units to be taught, so the final product is a comprehensive outline.

Earlier I provided a metaphor of a chef, but I will now purposely mix metaphors to provide a different vantage point. Essentially, the CYO provides teachers with a curriculum road map for the year. Imagine sightseeing road travelers who originate in San Francisco, wish to reach New York City, and plan to take advantage of main attractions on the way. They would map out their journey so that they reach several milestones while setting their sights on the final destination. As teachers travel along the school year, they are charged with teaching to these milestones in a productive and well-organized manner through June, and the CYO records this journey in detail.

Validate Teaching to Standards and Accountability to Using Standards as a Guide

When I first work with teachers to create a CYO, they seem hesitant and apprehensive when I broach the conversation about which standards they meet and how they meet them. First, I ask them just to talk about what goes on in their classrooms at a certain time of year. After teachers share information about a unit, I take out the standards and point to those that they meet. This validates what they do. Sometimes standards are written in lofty language, or the teachers are not so familiar with each of them, so they are unaware that they are meeting so many standards in their classrooms week in and week out. Teachers beam as they realize that most standards are not so cumbersome, or that they are meeting many more than they originally thought. This moment of self-reflection and affirmation is gratifying, and makes it easier to discuss which standards need further attention or are trouble spots.

In the business world, management by objectives (MBO) is a common way of conducting business. Managers who set objectives are more likely to achieve them than those who do not. Striving to reach an objective without specific or measurable goals is analogous to managing by the seat of your pants. Teaching is no different. Teaching is less effective when teachers haphazardly teach with no standards to guide them.

Peter Drucker (1993), preeminent author of numerous economics publications, editorial columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, and professor, states in his book *The Practice of Management*, “Setting objectives enables a business to get where it should be going rather than be the plaything of weather, winds, and accidents.” In teaching, standards help to set objectives as they provide teachers with a target to shoot for and allow for measurement. One cannot manage or teach effectively what one does not measure. This is an important point to mention to teachers to emphasize the importance of grade-level standards.

Regardless of the knowledge teachers have about standards or their epiphany at covering more standards than they thought, the important by-product of

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creating a CYO is teachers' realization that they are accountable to teach to district or state standards or other guidelines set forth by the school. In fact, local or state regulations mandate that teachers teach to certain standards. The CYO is also a valuable exercise in uncovering those standards that teachers feel are developmentally inappropriate or determining that some standards might be addressed through colleague collaboration. These valuable conversations about standards set the stage for articulation across grade levels.

Identify Skills and Concepts Embedded in Standards and Craft Guiding Questions

One significant purpose of critically reviewing standards is for teachers to identify key facts, skills, and concepts embedded in them in an effort to be clear-sighted about the overarching objectives and essential understandings of any unit. Additionally, crafting guiding questions allows teachers to be crystal clear about what the essence of instruction involves, so they can focus their learning and guide students. Many standards documents do a fine job of listing facts that students should come to know. However, if teachers were to teach solely a set of isolated facts and details, the students would not glean as much as if they were taught these facts within a conceptual framework. As teachers examine the standards and come to understand these key facts, skills, and overarching concepts and begin to design guiding questions, they will be more informed when plotting standards and their essential information. These key facets will then be used to create, remodel, or find effective curriculum units of instruction so students will receive a sound instructional program.

Reference Culminating Unit Assessments

Good teaching dictates ongoing assessment in a variety of ways throughout the unit, such as informally or formally tracking student participation during classroom discussion, assessing performance on homework and in-class work, and the like. Additionally, at the end of a unit teachers issue an assessment that reflects what students have learned after a comprehensive unit of study. Some teachers call it a culminating project or product, and it is typically authentic, extensive, and differentiated. It might be a writing assignment, a creative project, a lab demonstration, or a performance. The Curriculum Year Overview includes a list of ongoing assessments, as well as the culminating projects. The actual curriculum units will include the comprehensive detail of the activities and accompanying assessments, for if too much detail were included in each CYO, it would be cumbersome and deter teachers from using it. State, school, and district assessments are listed as well.

Provide a Comprehensive Listing of Available Resources and Materials

Included in this yearlong outline is a comprehensive listing of teachers' resources and materials that support specific standards. These can include whatever teachers have at their disposal—resources and materials from colleagues

and the school library, a published or teacher-generated unit guide, textbooks, speaker information, and so on. For example, a teacher who conducts a unit on rocks and minerals would enter a catalogue of resources, such as a student science textbook with page and chapter numbers cited, picture book titles, an excerpt from a college text, library book references, Web site links, a reference to a colleague, rock and mineral samples, and field trip information for a local museum. When teachers begin their units of instruction, all resource references are on hand in the CYO so they can prepare appropriately.

Allow for Support and Consistency in a Grade Level and Foster Teamwork

Teachers often move or retire, leaving the school in the position of filling a teaching assignment. Or an experienced teacher changes grade levels and is unfamiliar with the curriculum of the new grade. Presenting new teachers or seasoned teachers who change grades with a Curriculum Year Overview will assist them in their new positions. A CYO decreases the time it takes veteran teachers to apprise the new hires about what is covered in their grades, supports consistency in a grade level, allows all teachers to see new perspectives, and provides much-needed and appreciated support for those beginning a new position that is oftentimes overwhelming.

Because it features a master plan, a CYO can also foster teamwork among job share partners, teachers on an interdisciplinary team, and those who work at the same grade level. In a job share situation, the CYO certainly aids in continuity, since teachers are switching off days, weeks, or even semesters. Most important, in creating a CYO as a job share team, teachers can be in concert with one another philosophically about how they approach units of study; for example, how they group particular standards, craft unit guiding questions, delineate skills, and design assessments.

In an interdisciplinary team, teachers can foster teamwork by planning their units of study to coincide thematically, so students can make connections and further their understanding of concepts. In *The Parallel Curriculum Model (2001)* by Carol Tomlinson et al., the authors propose “developing appropriately challenging curriculum using . . . four ‘parallel’ ways of thinking about course content.” One of the parallels, the Parallel of Connections, leads students to make connections within or across disciplines, times, cultures, or places. When learning is coupled in a meaningful way that fosters connections, the brain is more effective in assimilating and retaining this information. For example, teachers in a team might create a thematic unit for “conflicts” so that in language arts, students read various short stories in which groups of individuals encounter conflicts. In social studies, students study the patterns and causes of various wars. In science, students study chemical warfare or conflicts that stem from a particular scientific topic (e.g., genetically engineered products or environmental issues). Working as an interdisciplinary team, teachers can devise the CYO so these units of study coincide not only thematically, but also in a complementary timeframe so that specific lessons are taught simultaneously to foster connective learning. Also, the guiding questions that team teachers devise serve to make the unit cohesive so that students can see the connections across content areas.

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Aside from job sharing and interdisciplinary teams, teachers who work on a grade-level team can also use the CYO to provide consistency among content taught. In communities where parents are highly involved, some teachers say that the CYO helps to satisfy parents' issues or concerns about what is covered from classroom to classroom at the same grade, and even from grade to grade. That said, teachers are not always required to work together to plan what they teach and when they teach it. Teachers in the same grade level can cover standards in different ways, and that works quite well in many schools and allows for flexibility of teachers' styles and interests. Hence, the CYO reflects different teaching approaches but verifies that the same standards are addressed.

Promote Articulation From Grade to Grade

A significant benefit to creating a CYO is to inform teachers about what is taught in other grades. Teachers often read standards for their assigned grade levels and subjects without glancing at the standards and related units for grades flanking their own. It would behoove teachers to know what is taught before and after theirs—and even in additional grades—so they can plan appropriate instruction and avoid needless repetition. Certainly, students can benefit from frequent exposure to material for reinforcement, but if students are repeatedly presented with the same facts, skills, resources, and assessments, teachers are not serving them well. Creating a CYO that is in the students' best interest means that teachers have read other CYOs or standards in different grades and are aware of what other grade-level teachers are teaching. In this way, teachers can create their grade-level curricular maps and include references for making connections among concepts, introducing or reinforcing key skills in a thoughtful manner, scaffolding learning, and so forth.

Serve as a Marketing and Communications Tool

The CYO can be a useful tool to share with parents who are interested in what will be covered in a school year. Some teachers make the entire document available at back-to-school night; others share only the pacing of representative topics of the document. Some principals have the CYOs on hand for those community members interested in seeing it, or invite a key individual to present the CYO—or excerpts of it—at school board meetings. Sharing the entire CYO or excerpts with vested members of the school community can serve to illustrate teachers' professionalism. Teachers do not sing their own praises enough, and sharing CYOs is a vehicle to market the fine work that teachers do.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER SUPPORT

Collaborating with teachers to create Curriculum Year Overviews is usually part of the overarching goals of the school or district. The CYO should then be substantially supported by designing or identifying existing comprehensive curriculum plus instructional support, as needed. When the Curriculum Year Overview is created and amply supported by necessary curriculum plus

instruction, teachers are equipped to thoroughly teach to the document so they can effectively serve students. This additional support is crucial and essentially a natural outgrowth of this document, because a CYO is definitely not a project done in isolation. The following scenarios can clarify my point:

1. *Wanted: Curriculum Resources.* As teachers convene to create a CYO, they examine grade-level content standards and carefully discuss their professional experiences with each applicable standard. In doing so, they often realize that they do not have the resources and materials to teach to a particular standard. It might be because it is a fairly new state or district standard, so the teachers do not have curriculum available. They are then tempted to write down only selected standards on the CYO, because they know they do not have the materials and resources to teach all the necessary standards. If administrators make it clear that teachers will have the necessary resources in time and money to obtain curriculum, materials, and even professional development to fully address each standard, they might be less hesitant to include all essential standards in the CYO.

2. *You Mean It Is Not My Standard?* As teachers review each standard for their grade and subject, they sometimes realize that a unit they have enjoyed teaching and perfecting for years does not necessarily fall under their jurisdiction. They discuss the hesitancy of offering their existing lessons and materials to the grade in which the standard is assigned. One reason for the reluctance is that they would then have to fill the time they spent teaching this unit with something else, and they lack resources and materials for an alternate unit of instruction. Another barrier to letting go of the unit is that teachers who have taught this content for years have invested a lot of time developing lessons and spending money for materials and resources. If, however, administrators make it clear that teachers will be granted the resources to obtain curriculum for a standard assigned to their grade and possibly release time or a stipend to develop a unit and gather additional materials, they might be willing to offer their existing lessons or unit to the grade for which the standard is designated.

3. *I Need to Go Back to School.* To expand on the aforementioned point, when teachers work on a CYO, they realize that some units of instruction they teach are not within their comfort level of expertise for a variety of reasons. I urge you to create an atmosphere that is inviting and comfortable enough for educators to express their concerns about teaching particular standards. Why? Because stating their feelings of inadequacy in certain areas paves the way for making a professional development plan in specific content areas for teachers who need it. The teacher who is uncomfortable teaching grammar can enroll in a class at a local community college, or someone needing assistance with a particular science concept can take an online course. It is critical that teachers receive the training necessary to teach effectively. Admitting what areas need improvement is a significant step toward obtaining the necessary support.

4. *We Need to Talk.* As a group of teachers work on a CYO, it is natural that they ask the question: "What should students come to my grade level knowing?" Equally important is the question: "What should we expect our students to know

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in preparation for the next grade?” Standards serve as a guide, but often they are not specific enough. A CYO opens the door for teachers to discuss answers to questions about what students should know when they leave and enter a grade. Articulation is a resounding theme as teachers work on the mapping document. In Chapter 3 are examples of projects that were by-products of a CYO that I have worked on with teachers for the express purpose of articulating and extending the information in the standards document for multiple grades.

Teachers will be more likely to develop a realistic and meaningful CYO if it is sufficiently supported. Therefore, administrators or other decision makers might consider appropriate budgeting and planning for one or more of the following. The end result would service students optimally, since the CYO sets the stage for more professional support for teachers so they can expand their expertise.

- Plan professional development days for the school or district.
- Arrange for district or school personnel or outside consultants.
- Provide curriculum resources and materials.
- Allow for release time to develop units of instruction, for conferences to build expertise in an area, to shadow colleagues, and so on.

POSSIBLE SITUATIONS

I have been fortunate to work with dedicated teaching professionals who take their work seriously and who consistently wish to hone their craft. In fact, this book could not have been written without the input from these creative, hard-working teachers. I would like to share some of my observations in working with them to assist you in your journey through the CYO process:

What if some teachers on a grade-level team do not want to help create a Curriculum Year Overview? I have learned along the way that it is essential to garner teachers’ support and willingness to create a CYO prior to sitting around the table. But the reality is that this just may not happen. Sometimes, for a variety of reasons, not all grade-level team members are inclined to participate. A teacher about to retire may not be interested in devoting time to the project, a personality clash may exist among colleagues, a teacher may be on maternity leave or have other district or school commitments, and so on. If some are not interested, not all teachers in a particular grade level need to be involved in the process to create the CYO. For example, I have found that maybe two teachers out of a grade-level team of five decide they want to participate. Once it is complete and ready for piloting, others will hopefully see the value. They might ask for a copy or ask to be part of the review process and help with revision at a future date. Furthermore, those who are enthused about entering into this process might be hampered when sitting with colleagues who are less motivated and disenfranchised. Getting the best work from people is challenging when negative energy pervades the room. In addition to the buy-in factor, writing with this smaller group can be a more effective and efficient use of time. That said, administrators might feel compelled to involve all team members, including those who are uninterested. In this case,

maybe a compromise would work, in which the first session includes everyone so all ideas are voiced, and subsequent meetings involve a smaller group of those most invested in the process.

What if teachers in a grade level do not satisfy standards in the same way? Some teachers who teach the same grade choose to plan together and teach the identical curriculum. In other schools or grades within a school, teachers approach standards differently based on their teaching styles and interests, but satisfy standards equally well. For example, one writing standard for seventh grade specifies that students produce a formal response to literature essay, at a minimum of 500 to 700 words. One teacher might assign students a collection of short stories, while another might expect students to respond to Jack London's novella *To Build a Fire*, and a third teacher might have students read a lengthy novel. Since there are a variety of ways teachers can satisfy standards, they can either find some common ground to include in the CYO or work separately to create different curriculum maps reflecting the practices of each teacher or group of teachers.

Are teachers usually familiar with standards for the grade they teach? In Chapter 2, you will find a detailed process for creating a CYO document. Near the beginning of producing it, you will allow time for teachers to peruse all the grade-level standards carefully so everyone is familiar with them, because you will likely be working with a diverse group of teachers with varying experience. Typically, teachers are not well versed in *all* the standards in a given grade level. This can happen because some standards are new to a grade level, teachers might be experienced but have been reassigned to a different grade level, teachers are inexperienced or new to the profession, or teachers simply have not taken the time to view them all because it was not made a priority. Even the most experienced teachers will need to study standards as you use them to assist with identifying skills, concepts, guiding questions, and so forth. The CYO is analogous to the fundamental framework for any balanced meal. Without teachers fully aware of what standards they are to teach, the meal is imbalanced; hence, the menu is incomplete and proper nutrition is compromised.

Can standards be reassigned to a different grade? I think it can work to reassign some standards to different grade levels within a school site, as long as they are developmentally appropriate for students and students graduate from that school exposed to all standards. For example in one school, teachers in sixth and seventh grades rearranged and regrouped the social studies and history standards so that students study geographical regions (e.g., Europe, Asia) together instead of time periods (e.g., Middle Ages, Renaissance). At the end of their time spent at this school, all students in sixth and seventh grades will still benefit from all social studies and history standards. I have seen this accomplished with science content standards, too. The decision to reassign standards to different grades is not something that a grade-level group can determine on its own, of course. It might not be a realistic option in some schools or districts because of standards mandates or because there is too much student mobility. But if this topic is broached during discussion, you might recommend that teachers approach their administrators and suggest designating a committee to discuss

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the viability of such an arrangement, examine all sides of the issue, and determine the process of engendering support and gaining approval.

Is this standard already being taught? One scenario I have encountered is teachers reading a standard and commenting, “Teachers address this standard in a different grade, but it is assigned to *our* grade level to teach.” In this instance, I suggest that teachers meet with the other grade level to determine how much of the standard is met and how it is approached. It could be that another teacher is providing a cursory introduction, in which case teachers can thank their colleague in a prior grade for properly launching the unit that has served to prepare students for continued study. Or it might be that a teacher of a subsequent grade provides more in-depth instruction that further enhances the concept emanating from a standard. So teachers should speak with their colleagues to determine the end value for students. Have them focus the discussion on *how* the standard and its accompanying facts, concepts, and so on are specifically addressed to ensure that there is some variance and opportunity for learning growth. There might be value in teaching both units, because each lends itself to something meaningful for students at various levels of complexity, or it might be determined that one grade addresses the standard just fine and relegate the teaching to that grade level. Be cautious, though, to refer to the district’s policy on the flexibility of switching standards to other grades to prime you for this discussion. Remember that one major purpose of creating a CYO is to document curriculum taught from one grade to the next, so teachers are cognizant of such articulation and can plan appropriately. We are not planning each menu item in isolation. The offerings need to complement one another for an overall well-rounded menu. You can suggest that participants undertake the project explained in Chapter 3, which focuses on articulation from grade to grade in very specific terms. In doing so, the issue of who teaches what and to what extent can be addressed formally.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

As you embark upon this project, know that it is hard work but realize it is an intensely rewarding project for teachers and for you as facilitator. Each time I work with teachers to create a CYO, they are amazed at the finished project that they will pilot. They are energized to begin planning and teaching with the new document in hand. The process of developing a CYO provides teachers a collaborative opportunity to discuss teaching approaches, analyze the value of teaching or not teaching certain units of study, examine and discuss philosophical similarities and differences, and share best practices. Most important, it allows teachers to think about, record, and implement different approaches to teaching a unit as they incorporate what they learn about skills, concepts, assessments, and guiding questions. In short, the work that transpires during the CYO process elevates teachers’ level of professionalism. Learning something new is rewarding at any age.