

Introduction

I wrote this book, from one educator to another, to help with the challenges (and adventures) we face every day in education, from challenges of diverse populations to challenges presented by waves of public policy issues that are thrust upon us. Educators, often the forgotten public servants, rise each day to meet the challenges of educating America's youth. This is true whether we find ourselves in public schools, academies, or private schools. It is true whether our students are young or old, native speakers of English or another language, of different races or creeds, or challenged emotionally, physically, or mentally. We devotedly serve them all.

THE FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

In this book I have shared my process and expertise in meeting the all-encompassing challenge of implementing standardized or mandated curriculum with mandated high-stakes student achievement testing. The goal of this book for administrators, curriculum directors and facilitators, and teacher teams (school improvement teams, grade-level teams, curriculum councils, etc.) that must address student achievement through mandated testing is to help districts increase their state test scores by aligning mandated curriculum to mandated testing through the teaching and learning process (classroom instruction).

As a former director of instruction at a regional school district in the Midwest, and a current curriculum consultant to schools, I have worked with small and large districts, both succeeding and struggling with student achievement. Together with those experiences and my training as a coach for failing schools, I have developed a systematic process for simplifying and addressing the implementation and measurement of standardized curriculum. Through data and the school improvement process, curriculum can be addressed, implemented, and evaluated in a logical step-by-step and teacher-based process that can be accomplished in one to three years. This book demonstrates and walks educators through the journey of building a system of curriculum processes based on district-mandated curriculum, whether that curriculum is dictated from the state department of education or other sources.

This curriculum system presents a plan of attack for mandated standards and testing and complete curriculum processes in such a way as to make its implementation in the classroom consistent and stable. This stabilizing of curriculum promotes consistent achievement for all students and results in consistently improved student achievement scores. Because this book presents a system of curriculum processes, it is not intended for an individual teacher who is isolated in his or her attempt to implement mandated curriculum. Rather, it is intended as a system of teaming and integrating curriculum processes with the teacher at the center.

It is also important to note that this is not a book on curriculum theory or models of curriculum development, nor am I offering guidance on designing curriculum or determining its value. I am presenting the concepts of building a system to align curriculum so that schools can stabilize their standardized achievement scores while enhancing good educational practices and student learning. This said, if at the end of this book I am accused by curriculum specialists of making curriculum and achievement models too simple, then I have met my goal.

Successful curriculum-instructional implementation is the number-one component of consistent student achievement (Marzano, 2003). This is what Marzano refers to as a *guaranteed and viable curriculum*. In *Results Now* Schmoker (2006) reinforces this concept, referring to a lack of curriculum cohesiveness as curriculum chaos: “I want to be as emphatic as possible: the impact of the actual taught curriculum on school quality, on student learning, is indescribably important. . . . That is, if teachers can lay out a sound—a viable—set of standards and can then guarantee (more or less) that these standards actually get taught, we can raise levels of achievement immensely” (p. 36).

However, creating a viable, orderly, and cohesive curriculum based on consistent standards, let alone implementing good instructional models and skills, can be confusing, cumbersome, erratic, difficult to implement, and even harder to sustain. Therefore, I have made this book as focused, succinct, and practical as possible and have provided a structured set of curriculum process steps or tasks that districts and schools can use to systematize their curriculum, eliminating curriculum chaos. It is an implementation model grounded in my own learning (both formal and informal), my curriculum experience, and the knowledge and experience of other curriculum experts. It puts all the pieces of curriculum together in one model, concentrating on the base curriculum processes in a way that is teacher driven, teacher owned, and accessible to all.

In my experience, the key to effective curriculum processes is teacher knowledge and understanding of curriculum and its implementation. My work is based on the concepts of the learning organization (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Schön, 1971; Senge, 1994) and such key learning theories as experiential learning (Dewey, 1916), constructivism (Bruner, 1966), adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984), and workplace motivational theory (Argyris & Schön, 1992; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993). In other words, the entire organization must be continually evolving and learning in the area of its expertise, which for us is education. And the direct practitioners—the teachers in the classrooms—must know and understand what is being done in curriculum, both in their classrooms and in the larger sense of their students’ K–12 experience (Deming, 1994; Jacobs, 1997; Senge, 1994). Teachers must be able to experience the development of curriculum processes and construct the meaning between what they are teaching and the curriculum at large. However, their understanding must be deep, imaginative, and fold into a structure so that what they accomplish is a system. We must be very careful not to waste time with sporadic programs and attempts at creating pieces of curriculum that are then affected by the continuous flux of changing administrators, teachers, materials, programs, or even boards of education.

THE ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

To manage the enormous task of curriculum, when working with schools I have divided it into three phases, which I call the *pillars of curriculum*: processes, delivery, and interventions. My arbitrary division into chunks encompasses the curriculum umbrella yet creates visual,

understandable, and doable components. The phases are designed to follow one another, and although this is not entirely possible when working with such complex systems as school districts, their presentation in sequence provides for a clear understanding of how areas of curriculum fit together.

Curriculum processes are the base documents that set the foundation for classroom delivery. These processes consist of data analysis, curriculum alignment, curriculum mapping, instructional pace guides, and local common assessment. Curriculum delivery is the teaching and learning process and consists of the instructional processes, materials, and other resources that are used to deliver the curriculum to students. Curriculum interventions are those that a district implements for students who have not yet shown proficiency. This book is intended to focus only on the first phase, which is the documentation and assessment of curriculum processes. However, the beginning of the book shows how these three pillars are defined and how they work together.

Concentrating on the use of teacher teams, in conjunction with a facilitator and the support of the administration, this book chronicles the techniques and procedures that can be used to complete the processes necessary to establish a strong, sustainable, and effective curriculum foundation.

The Organization and Structure of the Curriculum Process

The curriculum process comprises five major steps of documentation and evaluation called the DAILY curriculum system, which is a step-by-step guide that is scaffolded as follows:

D = Data analysis

A = Alignment of standards (with goal setting and curriculum mapping)

I = Instructional pace guides

L = Local common assessments

Y = Yearly documentation review

Each section of the book helps a district or school teacher-led team through the DAILY system:

Part I: Foundations of the DAILY curriculum system

Part II: The journey through each specific step of the DAILY system

Part III: Maintaining and sustaining a stable curriculum system through the DAILY system

The book also includes features for practical use, such as samples, templates, facilitator tips, educator quotes and comments, and stories from the field. These features are designed to give district or school administrators, curriculum personnel, or teacher teams an in-depth understanding of the DAILY system steps with practical application.

The Organization and Structure of the Book

Part I: Foundations of Purpose and Implementation (Chapters 1–3)

This part of the book sets the foundation for teacher-based curriculum process work and describes the DAILY system in detail. It explains curriculum and its phases as well as

how the processes are connected to school improvement. It also defines how I use the terms of curriculum, which are often used interchangeably in the field and cause confusion for practitioners trying to work with curriculum. Part I then describes the concepts that the work is based on (teacher knowledge and discourse) and gives a brief theoretical background for the success of this work. This is necessary because as curriculum directors and/or teachers begin and sustain work in following this curriculum process, they may need theoretical ammunition to justify their actions. Part I concludes by laying out the first steps to take, such as setting up teacher teams, creating time frames, securing administrative support, making financial commitments, and so forth.

Part II: A Planned Journey of Curriculum Processes (Chapters 4–9)

This part is the how-to of building a curriculum process system. It addresses how to complete each process as set forth in the earlier chapters. These processes start with data and move through curriculum alignment, instructional goal setting, curriculum mapping, creation of instructional pace guides, assessment blueprints, and finally the creation of local common assessments. Each chapter in Part II opens with an introduction to a curriculum process and a chart indicating where the process fits in the overall system. Giving further dimensions to each process are boxes labeled “Facilitator Hints” as well as examples and comments from educators.

Part III: Maintaining Stability and Success (Chapter 10 and Conclusion)

This important final chapter addresses how to monitor and keep district or school curriculum processes going once they have been established by teachers. It presents areas that may need troubleshooting and common pitfalls that may be encountered in keeping a consistent and efficient curriculum structure. Chapter 10 also discusses how to continually adjust and update the curriculum system. Part III concludes with some next steps in school improvement and curriculum that curriculum personnel and teachers, along with their districts, can address in the never-ending process of teaching and learning. This Conclusion makes the connections so that districts can move into the next pillar of curriculum (teaching and learning), thus delivering the documented curriculum.

The Organization and Structure of Educator Resources

For district, school, and/or teacher team use, I have included several additional resources at the end of the book:

Resource A, Further Reading: Since each step of the curriculum process model can be a subject unto itself, this resource suggests further reading for those who would like to explore in more detail any subject or skill presented in this book.

Resource B, Sample Agendas: Sample agendas for each curriculum step are provided to aid curriculum personnel or teacher teams in designing their curriculum days.

Resource C, Blank Forms: Blank forms of the sample curriculum documents shown in the chapters are provided for district and/or teacher team use.

Resource D, Sample Curriculum Maps: These are provided as examples of how the DAILY maps have been aligned to standards. In practice, curriculum maps are often sized such that they fit on a single 11 × 17 inch page for ease of use.

Resource E, Sample Local K–8 Common Assessment Manual for English Language Arts and Mathematics: District and/or teacher teams can use this manual as an example and template for developing their manual to systemize the local common assessment process.

MOVING FORWARD

In the many districts I have worked with, every time we have addressed mandated curriculum and assessment using a systematic and teacher-based curriculum process approach, we have seen a steady rise in student achievement as measured on state achievement tests. This has been especially true for low-achieving or failing schools. Building a curriculum system from data to assessment, through teacher-teaming processes, creates a system within a failing school to connect teaching and learning process while developing a structure that is coherent, organized, and manageable for administrators. This does not mean that other areas of school improvement (such as teaching and learning strategies, parent and community involvement, systems of intervention and efficient infrastructure) are not important; it simply means that curriculum is the lifeline to them all.

The systematic teacher-driven approach that unfolds in the following chapters will truly give districts the power to control the lifeline of their own students' achievement. Through purposeful curriculum processes and documentation, we can make the educational journey successful for teachers and students.