

Reading 2

Practical Uses for Curriculum Mapping

by Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacobs

In the fall of 1988, I was asked to work with a New Jersey school district on refining their curriculum articulation and integration. In a conversation with a seventh grade team I asked the question, "What will you actually be teaching this year?" The English teacher smiled and responded, "You mean what will each of us be doing tomorrow?" I said, in September, October, and so on. How can we integrate the curriculum if we don't know what it is? The teacher responded, "That's interesting because I only can tell you about my classes. I really have no idea what anybody else does in any detail." Following that conversation a blatant fact emerged . . . few school staff members have any knowledge about the operational curriculum in any other class but their own. This lack of information is not something any teacher or principal wants, but the old ways of curriculum committee reports and state lists of guidelines often do not correspond to what Maria, David, Jane, and Zack will receive in our classes. Over the years I have been wrestling with mounting their maps on computers to short cut that process. Technology should be used by school personnel as well as children. The old style of curriculum writing stored in books on dusty shelves filed away is no longer suited to our time with the exponential growth of knowledge. The following is a list of six practical uses for curriculum mapping based on your operational school calendar:

(1) GAIN INFORMATION. As teachers we are as effective as what we know. If we have no working knowledge of what our students have studied the years before, then how can we build on the learning? If we have no insight into what the curriculum will be, then how can we prepare our learners? If at a minimum you were to use mapping to simply find out what is really being taught in your building, then you are better off than you are now.

(2) IDENTIFY GAPS. Within the disciplines there is a tendency to assume that the committee outlines are accurate and that all teachers address the stated curriculum. Frequently there are gaps in what is actually taught that can have a real impact on a child's learning. Coordinators and supervisors cannot and should not be expected to know what transpires in each classroom. The only operational curriculum committee is com-

Source: From *Mapping the Big Picture: Integrating Curriculum and Assessment K-12* (pp. 17-23), by H. H. Jacobs, 1997, Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

posed of each and every classroom teacher. A base line reveals missing pieces in vertical articulation.

(3) IDENTIFY REPETITIONS. Too often teachers assume that they are introducing a book or a concept to students for the first time. There are far too many repeated units over the course of a student's K-12 experience. In some schools mapping has revealed the same novel or unit repeatedly addressed. It is questionable to claim the need for "review" when there are five units on the Rain Forest and six on dinosaurs in a district.

(4) IDENTIFY POTENTIAL AREAS FOR INTEGRATION. When appropriate the merging of two or more disciplines can make for a powerful and long-lasting learning experience. When looking at the spread sheet of what is taught and when it is taught through the course of a year, potential areas for concurrent teaching of subject as well as interdisciplinary unit design become evident.

(5) MATCH ASSESSMENT WITH DESIRED OUTCOMES. The only way we can find out if we are effective as a school is to match our desired outcomes with what the students produce. The only evidence we have of their growth is in what they write, what they say, what they build, what they design, what they compute. Hence, the thoughtful rethinking of assessment has swept our country as we prepare our children for a more demanding world. Targeting assessment through the course of the year forces deeper accountability. If your school says it wants students to become "problem solvers and decision makers," then through September to June, what do they perform and produce that gives evidence of problem solving and decision making in a formal assessment?

(6) REVIEW FOR TIMELINESS. With the proliferation of knowledge, our disciplines and interdisciplinary attempts should reflect a continual review for staying current. The latest work in each field should be reflected in our students' curriculum programs. In short, those Soviet Union units have got to go.

As schools have worked with mapping across the country, a wide range of applications have emerged. Decisions about text purchases, assistance to new teachers, communications with board members and parents are among those reported as uses for mapping. Probably the most powerful tool is as a guide for students. Of all members of the school community, the students have a right to see the map for their studies and learning.