

Curriculum Development and Implementation: The Irby-Lunenburg Model

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Abstract

There are many conceptions of the curriculum: as content, as learning experiences, as behavioral objectives, and as a plan for instruction. Many curriculum models have contained similar elements. Our own model of the curriculum embodies all of the aforementioned concepts. In our model, curriculum must be aligned with the vision and mission of the school. Although we believe that the principal is the curriculum and instructional leader, decisions on the curriculum must be shared with other stakeholders. Principals today need to be cognizant of the global society when developing curriculum. Furthermore, in an era of high-stakes testing, much of the curriculum alignment and audit processes will move from an analysis of the test alone to the results of the test and their connection to the curriculum and instruction.

Much of the professional literature currently stresses the need for supervisors and administrators to become more involved in curriculum development and implementation. The need to plan effective curricula is obvious because curriculum is often considered the heart of schooling (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). The difficulty, however, is there are various definitions of curriculum. Not everyone agrees what curriculum is or what is involved in curriculum development and implementation. We present a definition that allows different views and interpretations to exist—and which permits school administrators to become more involved in curriculum matters.

Curriculum specialists and scholars have offered a particular concept or model of the curriculum. Many of these concepts and models have contained similar elements. Some authors refer to the curriculum as a formal course of study, emphasizing content or subject matter. Others define the curriculum as the totality of experiences of each learner, stressing how subject matter is learned or the process of instruction. Still others point out the importance of statements of expected learning outcomes or behavioral objectives. Behavioral objectives are typically identified within some framework such as the subjects offered in the school program. And some describe the curriculum as a plan for instruction specific to a particular school or student population. Still, there are others who present concepts of curriculum holistically or categorically. Our own analysis of the many conceptions and models of the curriculum, which have evolved during the 20th century and currently, embodies all of the aforementioned definitions.

Irby-Lunenburg Model

We contend that with high-stakes testing dominating national and state agendas, the modern curriculum that is emerging must also include connected and aligned content objectives. Careful attention to the types of objectives written and the instructional delivery mode can take into account the issues brought forth by current curriculum philosophers. Our view for school administrators is that an integrated modern curriculum must be (a) led by the principal and developed collaboratively with teachers and community members; (b) considerate of the community; (c) responsive to the needs of the students related to academic needs, language needs, and social needs; (d) connected to the vision and mission of the school, which is usually focused on increased academic advancement of the students; (e) reflective of the needs of a global society; (f) able to be assessed in terms of how well the students are performing based on standards of performance; and (g) integrated systematically into the “whole” of the campus culture, programs, and instruction. This model is presented in Figure 1.

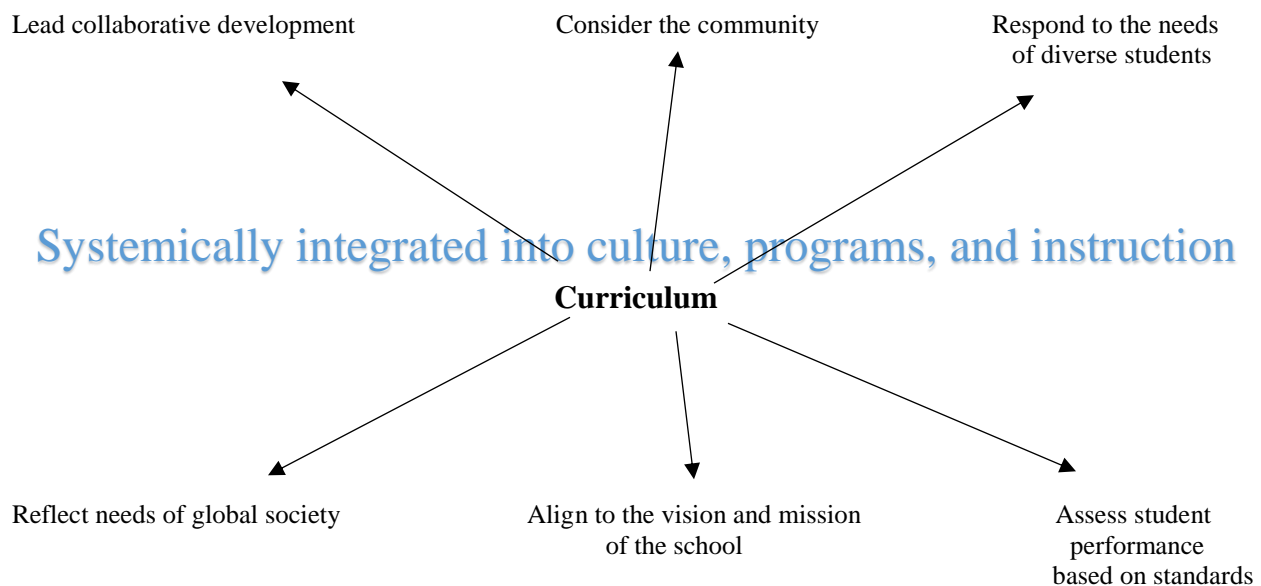


Figure 1. Irby and Lunenburg Model of Curriculum.

Principal Acts as Leader of Curriculum Efforts

There is a strong relationship between the level of the building principal’s leadership in curriculum project efforts and the success of both teachers and students. March and Peters (2002) studied the results of the Ohio Proficiency Test in six school districts. In one of those districts on all but one subtest, the proportion of students passing in one elementary building, where the principal was heavily involved leading curriculum efforts, exceeded by 5% to 15% the proportion of students who passed in a neighboring building where the principal provided limited leadership. It is the principal’s primary role to focus the entire staff on curriculum development, revision, or reform and empower them in their work (Mullen, 2012).

According to Allen (1995a), one strategy for empowering teachers is to provide a “highly interrelated set of three resource elements to support teachers as curriculum constructors” (p. 2). Such resources include (a) guiding frameworks (representative of various sources of input), (b) examples of other teachers’ and schools’ curricular practice, and (c) formal, collaborative protocols that provide for teacher discussion, reflection, and critique. Allen (1995b) provides the example the tuning protocol to represent the third type of resource. The tuning protocol helps structure teacher feedback and asks teachers to be “critical friends” to one another, to be their own best guides to reform. The protocol provides a safe, focused process for looking at students’ and teachers’ work and providing informed feedback on it (Allen, 1995b). The principal or lead teacher can facilitate a discussion within the parameters of preset norms.

If a faculty can develop skills of rigorous self-analysis, they will have added a valuable critical tool to their repertoire of curriculum change (Copeland & Knapp, 2006). Furthermore, schools need to develop habits of “civil discourse” — that is, new norms of conversation. Reflection about practice and about the curriculum is beneficial to teacher growth. The principal who engages faculty in this practice can improve the climate of the school, and it will become more professional, less subversive, and more respectful of real intellectual dialogue that fosters the development of shared understandings and more coherent action. As the principal facilitates critical self-reflection and analysis with colleagues, both the capacity for self-analysis among teachers and ways of critiquing each other’s work presume a primary responsibility and knowledge on the part of teachers to carry (with assistance from the principal) the work of reform (Parkay, Hass, & Anciaux, 2013). The principal’s primary goal in leading the curriculum is to empower teachers regarding curriculum development or reform.

As principals lead critical reflection, it is also their responsibility to encourage teachers to seriously examine curriculum that exists in the form of textbooks or other standards frameworks from the state or district. Sleeter (2002) provided an example of critical examination of the History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, first adopted by the California State Board of Education in 1987 and then re-adopted in 1994, 1998, and 2001 with only minor revisions. The examples follow and are self-revealing as to why it is utmost to critically examine such documents.

By claiming to tell a multicultural story, the Framework masks the ideology of its own story. One way to identify whose experiences center a narrative is to examine the people who appear in it. I counted people who were named for study in the Framework’s course descriptions. Of the 96 named Americans, 82% were male and 18% were female. They were 77% white, 18% African American, 4% Native American, 1% Latino, and 0% Asian American. All of the Latino and all but one of the Native American names appeared at elementary level. At the secondary level, 79% of the named people were white, mostly either U.S. presidents or famous artists and authors. This analysis suggests that the narrative is centered on experiences of white men.

Another way to identify whose experiences center a narrative is to examine the main topics and ask to whom they most closely relate. For the study of U.S. history, the progression of topics in the Framework traces the movement of Europeans and Euro-Americans west, and the expansion of the political boundaries of the U.S. People of color and women appear throughout, but within a storyline framed by this westward movement. Urging teachers to tell the stories of multiple groups within a structure of

topics that is based on Euro-American experiences, and especially those of English descent, masks the fact that multiple groups' stories are not being told.

Consider, for example, how indigenous people appear. In third grade, students study local history, beginning with local topography and landforms, then briefly indigenous people of the past, and then move on. In fourth grade, students study the history of California, and in that context, briefly study American Indian nations in California's past. In fifth grade, students begin to study U.S. history, starting with a unit devoted to pre-Columbian indigenous people. After that unit, indigenous people appear only sporadically, in relationship to the story of the westward movement of Euro-Americans. Even when the events such as the Trail of Tears are described as a tragedy, the basic cause of the displacement of indigenous people is not seriously problematized. (Sleeter, 2002, p. 8)

Curriculum is Considerate of the Community

As curriculum is developed or reformed, principals must indicate to teachers that community is taken into consideration on several accounts. First, the community should be taken into consideration when considering subject matter. For example, in the curriculum needs assessment, the community can be surveyed in several items generated by the teachers. An example would be work transfer skills needed in the community. Those skills would then become important in the curriculum planning. Another example here would be community interests in terms of service learning projects, which is an authentic curriculum and a concern that the community be involved in the learning itself. What community partners would best support significant service learning projects or community learning projects for the students?

Second, community members need to be included in the curriculum planning itself. Perhaps community members, including parents, may not be in on all the specific writing of the curriculum, but certainly they should be included in the assessment of it. Third, the type of community and needs must be considered. For example, Feldman (2003) indicated it is unlikely that curriculum change in a rural secondary school, closely integrated with community interests, is explained in the same way as change in a suburban school with a cosmopolitan orientation and a heavy investment in college preparatory programs. Conversely, urban schools might deal with funding, access, or safety as basic needs that will need to be addressed in the curriculum (Franklin, 2010). Consideration of varying contexts has current significance, in that modern society is tending to become more diversified (Hargreaves, 2012). Because curriculum and instructional strategies will likely differ from community to community, curriculum actions must be viewed within the context of a community, and such an activity demands that community members be involved.

Curriculum Responds to the Needs of the Students

Considering students' needs and interests presents a challenge to principals as they lead their faculty in curriculum reform. Consideration of student needs encourage more shared inquiry about special needs, such as inquiry about needs of students with disabilities and how to best serve them (Woodward & Cuban, 2001), students who are classified as gifted (Stambaugh & Chandler, 2011), students who are language minority (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002), students

who are economically deprived (Parrett & Budge, 2012) , and students from other cultures (Rennie & Wallace, 2011; none of these classifications is mutually exclusive from the others). The curriculum must also consider more shared inquiry between teachers and students, as opposed to fitting the program to the students. Choice in the curriculum must be considered as student interests are considered. Within the curriculum, the principal must note how students will be assessed and evaluated. Principals must keep in mind that curriculum needs to meet the students' needs, but it must also conform to some reasonably consistent guidelines and goals for what students should know.

Curriculum is Connected to the School's Vision and Mission

The focus of the vision and the school's mission should always be the students, and it is the "student" that is at the heart of schooling. The vision and the mission must be aligned to the curriculum and the instruction. Therefore, a vision for a school would include an interconnected system of (a) quality, (b) culturally and linguistically sensitive curriculum; (c) effective instructional practices; (d) ongoing professional development; and (e) meaningful accountability measures for the benefit of all learners (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). Principals must keep the curriculum focused on the vision and mission of the school. They must always ask teachers how the curriculum is moving the school toward the vision and how it is accomplishing the mission.

Curriculum Reflects the Needs of a Global Society

The principal must not only promote the needs of the immediate community but also be attuned to and share the reflections of the global society (Whitehead, Boschee, & Decker, 2012). He or she can do so (a) by promoting authentic curriculum; (b) by including service learning projects; (c) by incorporating and obtaining access to technology and its advances in hardware and knowledge generation; (d) by advancing critical thinking; (e) by problem finding and problem solving; (f) by bringing in cooperative learning; (g) by encouraging democratic, responsible, and politically and culturally aware citizenship; and (h) by incorporating multiple languages—or at least two, one native and one international.

Curriculum Can Be Assessed Based on Academic Performance Standards

The principal promotes an aligned curriculum with the skills and content to be tested as well as a curriculum map or sequence of skills necessary for success at each proximate grade level (Kallick & Colosimo, 2008). The standards-based assessments are grounded in basic academic skills across all populations. They provide for a clear and uniform benchmark for what all children (based locally, by state or in the nation) should know and be able to do at specified points in their academic development. Principals who maintain a standards-based curriculum address societal expectations, focusing on how students will be judged by the state and the nation beyond the classroom and the school district. Alternative assessments can provide valuable insights into student progress in the curriculum.

There is Systemic Integration of Culture, Programs, and Instruction

The principal is responsible for synthesizing the total of the aforementioned six components and ensuring that they run through all programs and they are observable in instruction. Additionally, the culture of the school should reflect these components from the curriculum, and all programs should be connected through the curriculum. No program should be an “isolationist” program on the campus. The principal should be able to articulate to the teachers, parents, central administration, and the community the path analysis of how one program relates to the other and how they are tied together by the curriculum of the campus.

Conclusion

There are many conceptions of the curriculum: as content, as learning experiences, as behavioral objectives, and as a plan for instruction. Many curriculum models have contained similar elements. Our own model of the curriculum embodies all of the aforementioned concepts. In our model, curriculum must be aligned with the vision and mission of the school. Although we believe that the principal is the curriculum and instructional leader, decisions on the curriculum must be shared with other stakeholders. Principals today need to be cognizant of the global society when developing curriculum. Furthermore, in an era of high-stakes testing, much of the curriculum alignment and audit processes will move from an analysis of the test alone to the results of the test and their connection to the curriculum and instruction.

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