

Curriculum Work is for the Summer

Curriculum is the what of education i.e. what children should learn in our schools.

Pedagogy is the how of education i.e. how children are learning in our schools.

Very simply, curriculum work is summer work; pedagogy is school year work. Of course, those of us who have created curriculum know very well that the two intermingle. Curriculum clearly have a variety of elements including:

- Courses and/or units of study within courses.
- Learning standards / objectives of those units / courses including both knowledge and skills. In a Christian school, this importantly includes the integration of
 - Mission outcomes
 - Christian values
 - Biblical grounding
 - Community practices
 - Cultural observances
- The sequence of instruction.
- Assignments and projects children must accomplish to achieve the learning standards / objectives.
- Materials used in a course / unit including books, digital resources, videos, presentations, handouts etc.
- Assessments to determine learning. These include
 - Formative assessment to inform the teacher where there are gaps in knowledge / skill acquisition and thus to identify instructional needs going forward in order for each child to achieve the learning standards / objectives.
 - Summative assessment to establish a child's progress at the calendar end of a course / unit of study and provide a 'final' evaluation.

Pedagogy / teaching approaches both overlap and are distinct from curriculum. Pedagogy is the method, practice and study of effective teaching. Effective pedagogy, often called instructional design, has learning for each child as its outcome. It is necessary to add the last statement because pedagogy without connection to the assessment of learning is meaningless. Examples of pedagogies might include:

- Direct instruction
- Problem-based learning
- Experiential learning
- Collaborative learning

- Inclusive teaching
- Active learning
- Project based learning
- Flipped Learning

Curriculum development is an intense process requiring immense focus, collaboration, research, and writing. CSM is very attuned to Backwards by Design (aka Wiggins and McTighe) recognizing that all good endeavors begin with the end in mind (cf. Covey). But whatever the process is called, almost all good curriculum development is reactive to the needs of the child. In other words, most teachers already have a curriculum to deliver and curriculum development is rarely from scratch. However, good teachers are always renewing and enriching their curriculum based on each teacher's experiences with children and each teacher's own professional growth in knowledge and understanding. Even when things are going well, there is much to continually consider and reflect on.

But not during the school year. During the school year, the focus should be entirely on taking what curriculum there is and continually engage with children and colleagues to self-assess what kind of learning is taking place. The units are set. The course objectives are set. Take them for granted. What is now important is the teacher – child interface whereby the curriculum objectives become part of the child's learning. Time outside the classroom setting that is available for 'planning' and 'collaboration' should be focused on how to better improve my ability to teach:

- Christian Professional Learning Community time
- In-service days
- Collaboration time during the school day
- Planning time
- Casual conversations
- Observations by academic administrators and/or peers
- Professional conversations

All should be focused purely on pedagogy – the how of education

Certainly, as the year progresses, teachers should be making notes about the curriculum. What is effective in terms of the learning objectives and what is not; what in the units seems to engage children's interest; insights children have and the advice they give through their responses; what children tell you when you reflect with them; reactions from parents as they communicate what their children tell them; insights from peers and academic administrators visiting the classroom; professional conversations.

Every teacher should then take those notes, prioritize, and make a plan for a week of summer curriculum work. This is NOT planning for the next year, as in, ensuring that everything is in place to teach for another year. This is moving the curriculum goalposts. It is a rewrite of a current unit. Maybe it is the creation of a brand new unit. Curriculum creation always involves:

- Collaboration – it is never a solo effort (that is called planning!); it is teachers working together as a professional learning team.
- 'Seeing' through the eyes of the child.

CSM recommends:

1. All teacher contracts include a week of formal curriculum development during the summer.
2. This week should be paid a stipend unless you already have your teachers on 12 month contracts (another CSM recommendation).
3. The week is chosen by the teachers.
4. The work is carried out through a collaboration.
5. The outcome is a product that will be used/tested during the academic year following the summer it was created.
6. The academic year is focused on pedagogy – how to increase learning for each child.

In our experience, there is too much ineffective curriculum work being done during the school year when intensity and focus is not possible. At the same time, teachers and their leaders are not talking about pedagogy enough, relating it to every child, not just the ‘problem’ child. The solution is to reverse the process and empower teachers to ignore the curriculum during the year (it is what it is at that point) and focus on pedagogy. And then empower teachers (and compensating them for this) to do intensive work in the summer on the curriculum. The outcome should be enhanced learning in the life of each child.

CSM Mission: For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students

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