

ENSURING

High-Quality Curriculum

HOW TO

DESIGN

REVISE

OR

ADOPT

CURRICULUM ALIGNED TO
STUDENT SUCCESS

ANGELA DI MICHELE LALOR



1703 N. Beauregard St. • Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
 Phone: 800-933-2723 or 703-578-9600 • Fax: 703-575-5400
 Website: www.ascd.org • E-mail: member@ascd.org
 Author guidelines: www.ascd.org/write

Deborah S. Delisle, *Executive Director*; Robert D. Clouse, *Managing Director, Digital Content & Publications*; Stefani Roth, *Publisher*; Genny Ostertag, *Director, Content Acquisitions*; Julie Houtz, *Director, Book Editing & Production*; Miriam Calderone, *Editor*; Thomas Lytle, *Senior Graphic Designer*; Mike Kalyan, *Manager, Production Services*; Cynthia Stock, *Production Designer*; Andrea Wilson, *Senior Production Specialist*

Copyright © 2017 ASCD. All rights reserved. It is illegal to reproduce copies of this work in print or electronic format (including reproductions displayed on a secure intranet or stored in a retrieval system or other electronic storage device from which copies can be made or displayed) without the prior written permission of the publisher. By purchasing only authorized electronic or print editions and not participating in or encouraging piracy of copyrighted materials, you support the rights of authors and publishers. Readers who wish to reproduce or republish excerpts of this work in print or electronic format may do so for a small fee by contacting the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923, USA (phone: 978-750-8400; fax: 978-646-8600; web: www.copyright.com). To inquire about site licensing options or any other reuse, contact ASCD Permissions at www.ascd.org/permissions, or permissions@ascd.org, or 703-575-5749. For a list of vendors authorized to license ASCD e-books to institutions, see www.ascd.org/epubs. Send translation inquiries to translations@ascd.org.

ASCD® and ASCD LEARN. TEACH. LEAD.® are registered trademarks of ASCD. All other trademarks contained in this book are the property of, and reserved by, their respective owners, and are used for editorial and informational purposes only. No such use should be construed to imply sponsorship or endorsement of the book by the respective owners.

Excerpts from Common Core State Standards © Copyright 2010. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.

All web links in this book are correct as of the publication date below but may have become inactive or otherwise modified since that time. If you notice a deactivated or changed link, please e-mail books@ascd.org with the words “Link Update” in the subject line. In your message, please specify the web link, the book title, and the page number on which the link appears.

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-4166-2279-6 ASCD product #116006 n10/16
 PDF E-BOOK ISBN: 978-1-4166-2281-9; see Books in Print for other formats.

Quantity discounts: 10–49, 10%; 50+, 15%; 1,000+, special discounts (e-mail programteam@ascd.org or call 800-933-2723, ext. 5773, or 703-575-5773). For desk copies, go to www.ascd.org/deskcopy.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[to be inserted]

TOC Title

Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction: The “Big Picture” of Curriculum.....	1
Consideration 1: Organizing Centers	9
Consideration 2: Alignment to Standards.....	24
Consideration 3: Standards Placement and Emphasis	46
Consideration 4: Assessment Types and Purposes	66
Consideration 5: Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments.....	84
Consideration 6: Instruction	111
Consideration 7: Resources That Support Instruction	136
Consideration 8: Success with Your Curriculum.....	155
Epilogue	173
Appendix A.....	176
Appendix B.....	184
References.....	202
Index	205
About the Author	xx

The “Big Picture” of Curriculum

“The 2nd grade teachers have common planning time once a month where they map out what they will be teaching.”

“The curriculum writing team will be meeting on Thursdays after school.”

“Please submit a list of recommendations for read-aloud books that support the social studies curriculum.”

“The school board has approved the adoption of a new reading program.”

These quotes capture the many and diverse ways that schools approach curriculum. Designing, adopting, or revising curriculum can be viewed as an exciting opportunity or a daunting task. An educator’s perspective is based on each individual’s prior experiences working with curriculum as well as that person’s personal view as to what constitutes quality. When individuals are then put into groups to adopt or design a curriculum, as is often the case, it becomes very difficult to select or create one. Often the result is an unwieldy and unmanageable curriculum, the purchase of a program that does not quite match up with what a district needs or values, or some variation in between.

My experiences in facilitating professional development programs related to curriculum led me to see a need for a book devoted to curriculum with the intent that readers would be able to use the information to guide the curriculum design process and evaluate curriculum in a meaningful and manageable way. Most books about curriculum are devoted to the design and examination of individual units of study that sit within the curriculum. What makes this book different is that it examines the “big picture” of curriculum—what needs to be considered when all the units are put together. By examining the big picture, educators can determine the curriculum’s strengths and weaknesses, and they can decide where to focus attention in its design and revision or where to supplement when adopting a published curriculum. And there *will* be a need for evaluation and revision, because the statement “curriculum is a living document” is amply true. In fact, considering a curriculum “done” is really an indicator that it is time to revisit the curriculum again.

Layers of Curriculum

To begin the process of evaluating and designing curriculum, we first must define what we mean by curriculum. Traditionally, curriculum is thought of as the *what* in teaching—what students learn in school. It sounds simple enough, but what students learn is multilayered and can be interpreted as many things, including content, skills and strategies, processes, books and resources, dispositions and habits of mind. To clarify the *what*, it is helpful to look at the different layers of curriculum (Martin-Kniep, 1999):

- *Formal curriculum* describes what students need to know, be able to do, and value.
- *Operational curriculum* translates formal curriculum into a plan for instruction.
- *Taught curriculum* is what is delivered in the classroom.
- *Assessed curriculum* is what is evaluated through formal measures.
- *Learned curriculum* is what students walk away understanding as a result of their learning experiences.

Formal Curriculum

When we hear the word *curriculum*, typically what we picture is the formal curriculum. Formal curriculum describes what students need to know, be able to do, and be like through statements in the form of national and local standards, content-specific understandings and practices, district- or teacher-generated outcomes and objectives, and other types of learning targets. Standards have different focuses but generally fall into three categories: process, content, and disposition. Process standards focus on skills and strategies, content standards identify either content-specific skills and practices or subject-specific information, and dispositional standards address ways of thinking or habits of mind.

Although standards have been used to guide classroom practice for many years, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have brought renewed attention to the standards-based design process and cause to revisit curriculum. The CCSS in English language arts (ELA) and literacy are an example of process standards. They lay out what students should be able to do at each grade level and are scaffolded from one grade level to the next, with each grade level building on the skills and processes from the previous grade level. They do not, however, prescribe the content that needs to be taught.

Content information can be gathered from other formal curriculum documents. For example, in New York State, social studies teachers use the CCLS (New York State's version of the CCSS) to guide reading and writing processes but use the state Social Studies Framework (New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework, n.d.) for guidelines regarding social studies content and practices specific to the discipline. The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS, 2013) are content standards that articulate content, science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts.

Cognitive processes, social and work habits, and thinking demands or dispositions can also serve as formal curriculum because they describe what students should be like or express what is valued in learning. Often these cognitive processes or ways of thinking are not articulated through standards but rather through formal descriptions, scales, or progressions

such as Bloom's taxonomy, Habits of Mind (Costa & Kallick, 2000), and executive function skills. In this book, categorical descriptions such as these are referenced as standards.

Regardless of focus, formal curriculum describes what the learner needs to know, be able to do, and value. The key word here is *learner*. It is the responsibility of the school and teachers to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn and demonstrate the content, skills, processes, and dispositions embedded within the standards, and this responsibility, in turn, generates the need for an operational curriculum.

Operational Curriculum

Standards lay out priorities and serve as the driving force behind the curriculum, answering the question *Why do we have to teach that?* However, by themselves standards cannot be used in the classroom; they must be made operational. The operational curriculum brings together different types of standards, content, texts, and resources. It identifies ways to assess student learning and provides appropriate learning experiences that can be used during instruction.

There has been a great deal of confusion about the formal curriculum and the operational curriculum. Formal curriculum does not dictate specifics such as the texts students will read or the type of animal to be studied when learning about habitats. Those specifics are identified in the operational curriculum, and in a quality curriculum, they should reflect the values and priorities of the community the curriculum serves. Standards are designed to ensure that all students have the same skills and use the same processes, whereas curriculum identifies what content and resources they will be using to do so.

Taught, Assessed, and Learned Curriculum

Through the operational curriculum, teachers make decisions about what occurs in the classroom and implement the taught curriculum. Many factors affect this decision-making process, including time, interest, and makeup of the student body. Given that no teacher and group of

students are ever the same from one classroom to the next, the taught curriculum will not be exactly the same in every classroom. It is unreasonable to assume that all teachers of the same grade level will be teaching exactly the same thing, the same way, on the same day. A quality curriculum will provide the information that teachers require to make purposeful decisions to meet student needs and provide the appropriate pathway for meeting the expectations outlined in the operational curriculum without dictating a one-way-suits-all approach.

Through the assessed curriculum, teachers are able to determine what the students have and have not learned, identify areas of strengths and needs, and make decisions about next steps in instruction. Once again, choices are made as to what is assessed. A quality curriculum includes assessments that closely align to the standards and big ideas found in each unit. A quality curriculum will also include different types of assessments so teachers can accurately determine the learned curriculum—what students know and understand as a result of instruction and how well student understanding aligns with the formal curriculum.

With so many layers in the curriculum, it is easy to see how standards can get “lost in translation.” Students do not always leave the classroom understanding the skills, processes, and content that have been identified in the formal curriculum. Although many factors affect learning, one that we do have control over is the use of the formal curriculum to create a purposefully aligned, engaging, and meaningful curriculum for our students.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized in five sections similar to the steps in a standards-based design process used to create curriculum: organizational structure, standards, assessment, instruction, and format. The chapters in each section focus on a specific consideration for the creation and examination of curriculum. They provide a detailed look at what you need to consider when you are examining or designing quality curriculum, and they include many examples and illustrations from different schools, content

areas, and grade levels. Within each chapter are tools and activities to help you further understand the attributes of a quality curriculum and, more important, to help you evaluate or plan your own curriculum and give you feedback as to what areas warrant further investigation. Each chapter ends with a summary, a brief recap of the tools and activities presented in the chapter, and a checklist that you can use during the evaluation or design process.

Organizational Structure of Curriculum

Consideration 1—Organizing Centers. The first area to consider when designing or evaluating curriculum is the organizing center. A unit's organizing center is communicated through its title, essential question, and big idea. A quality curriculum will organize units of study around centers that are worthy of the time and energy set aside for their pursuit, and that reflect the overall intent and purpose of the curriculum. This chapter examines the various components that make up the organizing center for a unit and provides a simple tool and guiding questions that will help you to examine or plan the organizing centers for your curriculum.

Standards

Consideration 2—Alignment to Standards. As many teachers reconsider their curriculum because of the adoption of new standards, it is worthwhile to first examine the curriculum to determine how well the assessments and learning experiences align to the standards. Too often a curriculum lists standards in a way that denotes equal importance, and the curriculum user or writer accepts that tasks align to the standards in equal measure. This chapter focuses on the importance of examining how standards are communicated within a curriculum and provides activities that will help you determine the degree of alignment between tasks and standards.

Consideration 3—Standards Placement and Emphasis. Another consideration when examining standards is how they are placed within the curriculum; order does matter. When determining placement and emphasis, it is important to consider factors such as the overall intent of the

standards, grade-level focus standards, gradual release of responsibility, and developmentally appropriate practice. This chapter explores each of the factors in detail and provides you with a choice of standards-analysis tools that are helpful in evaluating the placement of standards within the curriculum or when planning for design.

Assessment

Consideration 4—Assessment Types and Purposes. Teachers use four types of assessments to determine what students know, are able to do, and value. The types are information recall, demonstration, product assessment, and process assessment. A quality curriculum includes different types of assessments that are congruent with the standards for the unit. Teachers use these various assessments at different moments to ascertain what students know and are able to do. A quality curriculum will therefore include diagnostic assessments as well as assessments used for formative and summative purposes. This chapter explores the role of different types of assessments and the purposes they serve within a curriculum.

Consideration 5—Curriculum-Embedded Performance Assessments. A quality curriculum will include assessments that produce as well as measure learning. This chapter presents criteria for high-quality curriculum-embedded performance assessments that serve this purpose. These assessments measure the most important learning for the unit, are congruent with and strongly align to standards, have an authentic audience and purpose, and include diagnostic and formative assessment moments.

Instruction

Consideration 6—Instruction. Learning experiences and lessons are two ways to communicate what should be taught daily. Either structure should include information about what students will do, why they will do it, and what the teacher will have as evidence of student learning. These lessons and learning experiences should be strongly aligned to the standards for that unit. A quality curriculum includes learning experiences or lessons that address content, process, and dispositions. This chapter

provides strategies for ensuring the use of different types of lessons and learning experiences and includes information to guide instruction.

Consideration 7—Resources That Support Instruction. Resources include texts, technology, and materials that support instruction. The guiding principle behind the selection of these materials is how they will serve the purpose of the learning experience. This chapter offers guiding questions to assist you in the selection of resources to support the curriculum.

Format

Consideration 8—Success with Your Curriculum. This chapter reiterates the information provided throughout the book and offers three final thoughts for successfully implementing and using your curriculum. A quality curriculum is easily accessible to teachers and other educators who use it, is supported by professional development, and is connected to student work. Included in this chapter are examples, guiding questions, and student work protocols to help you successfully implement your curriculum.



CONSIDERATION 1

Organizing Centers

Which unit within each of the following example sets captures your attention?

Example Set 1

A. *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Great Depression: Students read *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and write a report on the Great Depression.

B. Literature or Life? In this unit students study the essential question *What's more real—literature or life?* They read several poems, short stories, and a full-length novel to analyze the connection between the time period in which the works were written and the events of the time. Students use their understanding of this connection to write their own review and analysis of a contemporary novel and how it reflects the lifestyle and values of today.

Example Set 2

A. Goods and Services: Students learn the difference between businesses in their community that sell goods and those that provide services. Based on what they have learned, they sort pictures of different businesses into the two categories.

B. The Business of Business: *What do you do?* Students understand that businesses provide different types of goods and services. They explore different types of businesses by analyzing

those in their own local community and conducting additional research on the goods and services provided by businesses online. Students prepare and conduct an interview with a local businessperson about the goods or services that individual provides for the community. Students use their understanding of goods and services, and information they learned from their interview, to write a proposal suggesting an idea for a new store or website that would provide a good or a service that their age group or family would find appealing.

Example Set 3

A. Habit of Mind 12—Wonderment and Awe: In this unit students study the habit of mind “wonderment and awe” (Costa & Kallick, 2000). They learn what this habit of mind means and find examples of how it exists in the world around them and in themselves.

B. Wonderment and Awe: *How do you see the world?* In this unit, students explore the habit of mind “wonderment and awe” and how it affects how people see the world. They find examples and nonexamples of how wonderment and awe affect a person’s views of text, art, music, and the natural world. Students end the unit by selecting a visual art form and using it to show how they see the world with wonderment and awe.

Sometimes first impressions do matter, and the way in which a curriculum first communicates what it values is through its organizing center. An organizing center is the central idea upon which a unit of study is built. It can be a topic, a theme, a concept, an issue, a problem, a process, or a phenomenon (Martin-Kniep, 2000). An organizing center is communicated through a unit’s title, essential question, and big idea. A quality curriculum will organize units of study around centers that are worthy of the time and energy set aside for their pursuit, and that reflect the overall intent and purpose of the curriculum.

So the question becomes, What is the best way to organize the curriculum? If you review the examples just provided, you can see the impact that decision has on the curriculum.

In the first example set, the same unit is organized around a text and a related topic, and then a simple question. The first organizational structure, Unit A of the set, limits the scope of the unit to a particular text (*The Grapes of Wrath*) and topic (the Great Depression). More than likely, students will be led through an in-depth analysis of the text with references to their research on the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. The unit has not been intentionally designed to make the leap from *The Grapes of Wrath* to other texts and time periods and to the larger question posed in Unit B: *What's more real—literature or life?*

In Unit B, students have the opportunity to examine the connection between literature and life, contemplating the role of fictional accounts in understanding real events and time periods. Although *The Grapes of Wrath* can still be a central text, teachers will likely want to consider additional works from other time periods, including *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee; *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald; and *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger. Each text allows students to examine how literature reflects real life and prepares them for an analysis of a contemporary work.

The units described in the second example set are from a financial literacy curriculum for elementary students. Unit A approaches the curriculum in a direct manner. The organizing center is the topic students will be studying: goods and services. In Unit A, students learn to distinguish between businesses that sell goods and those that provide services. Unit B identifies the context for the examination of goods and services by identifying the bigger idea of businesses. It personalizes the unit through the essential question *What do you do?*—a common question posed by adults among their peers. Although both units may have students engaging in similar activities, such as examining the types of goods and services provided in the community, only Unit B requires that students apply their understanding in a new and novel way.

In the third example set, the units come from a curriculum developed around the habits of mind articulated by Costa and Kallick (2000). Unit A is structured to present “wonderment and awe” as one in a series. Unit

B links the habit to an essential question, showing how wonderment and awe can affect the student and moving the unit from one that could be abstract to one that is practical. The essential question lends itself to exploration across mediums and content, bringing in literature, art, music, and science.

In each example set, Unit B

- Moves away from a topic to a bigger idea, concept, or essential question.
- Can be explored from different perspectives, across content, place, or time.
- Is relevant and meaningful because it results in the application to something bigger than school.
- Requires higher levels of thinking by asking students to analyze, evaluate, and create.

Organizing Centers in the Content Areas

The same principle of organizing centers applies to content areas. Let's look at a social studies unit to see the impact of three different organizing centers on the same unit of study. Typically social studies units are organized around topics such as the American Revolution. Students know that in such a unit they will learn about the war. Instruction will focus on the events that led to the war, the major battles, and the ultimate results. The unit stays within the context of that event, in that time, in that place.

Let's see what happens when the organizing center moves from topic to concept and the unit explores rebellions and revolutions. Now the unit lends itself to the exploration of other events. With this organizing center, the students first take a look at the American Revolution and then examine other events in American history that fall under the heading Rebellions and Revolutions. These events could include the Whiskey Rebellion, Shays Rebellion, the War of 1812, Nat Turner's rebellion, and John Brown's raid, to name a few.

A third approach to teaching these topics is to examine the same events through an organizing center of an essential question: *Rebellion or revolution?* This example differs slightly from the other two. Rather than focusing solely on the events, this essential question requires students to evaluate the events taught in the unit of study through different points of view. For example, in their examination of the American Revolution, students might examine how the British and the Loyalists viewed the events leading to the war and the war itself as acts of rebellion against the British king and parliament. At the same time, the Sons of Liberty, the patriots, and eventually the Continental Congress felt they had legitimate cause to sever ties with England and form their own country, hence the naming of the American Revolution. Similar studies of point of view and cause and effect are examined as they relate to each of the subsequent events, asking students to determine the legitimacy of the name given to the event and the way it is presented in history books—and, more important, establishing a set of criteria in which to examine rebellion and revolution in the world today.

Essential Questions

The unit title communicates the focus and importance of the unit, but it does not stand alone in identifying the organizing center. The organizing center is further explained by the unit's essential question.

Which of the following two groups of questions are essential? How do they differ from each other?

Group A

- What makes a story last?
- How do you measure success?
- What is more constant than change?
- Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?
- Are all leaders great?

Group B

- How do folktales and fables share a lesson or moral?
- How do you describe the characters in the story?
- What is erosion?
- How do poems incorporate similes and metaphors?
- What were the contributions of the American presidents?

The questions in Group A would be considered *essential questions* because they are large, global questions that can be explored and contemplated, elicit multiple perspectives, and do not require one correct answer. In Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins’s book on essential questions, these questions would be considered “overarching” essential questions (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013).

In a quality unit of study, the essential question provides the context and direction for the unit. It poses the focus of exploration as it relates to the unit title and in some cases serves as the title itself. If the essential question changed, the unit would go in a different direction, as seen in the social studies example just presented.

The essential questions in Group A are different from the questions in Group B, which are *guiding questions*. Although still important for articulating what students will examine in a unit of study, guiding questions are answerable and do not communicate the organizing center of the unit. Guiding questions identify the important skills, content, and dispositions of the unit and are used to create the classroom learning activities.

The Central or Big Idea

The central or big idea is a statement that identifies the most important learning of the unit in a clear and concise manner. Often it articulates a generalization related to the essential question and serves as the connector between the essential question and the unit title, as seen in the following examples:

Example 1

Unit Title: Civilizations: Old and New

Essential Question: What makes a civilization classical?

Big Idea: Students understand that classical civilizations share common characteristics and have left unique contributions that still affect us today.

Example 2

Unit Title: Homes for Everyone and Everything

Essential Question: Why is a home important?

Big Idea: Students understand that home is an important concept to all living species and that environmental challenges can affect a living species' ability to survive and thrive in its home.

The big idea communicates the overall outcome for the unit. Without it, the curriculum user would need to examine all of the curriculum components to determine the desired results, often resulting in multiple users having different interpretations. With clear articulation of the big idea, all users understand the importance of the unit—a consequence that is particularly valuable when it comes time for assessment, because the performance task is designed to measure the most important learning for the unit.

Implications for Evaluating, Creating, or Revising Curriculum

Although it may seem like the organizing center plays a minor role in the overall curriculum design and evaluation process, examining or determining the organizing center is an important first step. Keeping in mind that this book is about the “big picture” of curriculum, it is important to look beyond the first unit of study or the unit of study you are currently working on and examine or identify *all* the organizing centers for the curriculum to determine if they convey the message you want to send about what you value in curriculum.

An example from my work in P.S. 11 in New York City illustrates how examining and revising the organizing center can affect the overall curriculum. The principal, Dr. Joan Kong, invited me to work with the school's coach, Angela Miuta, and a group of teachers—Hande Williams, Teresa Ranieri, Thalia Jackson-Cole, Elvira Gonzalez, and Laura Magnotta—to assist them in using the New York State Common Core Learning Standards to design their own curriculum. The group engaged in a recursive process of design and revision based on implementation, and after several years of doing so they had to choose a textbook for English language arts. Because textbooks do not serve as curriculum, the group sat down to evaluate the new series and determine what needed to be done to make it their own. The following examples from the 4th grade curriculum illustrate what they found.

Unit 1: Animal Structure—*How does an animal's structure help it to live?* Students read informational texts about animals to compare, gather, and synthesize ideas. After doing so, they create an infographic on an animal by describing the animal's physical characteristics, its habitat, and special adaptations.

Unit 2: Regions of the United States—*How are the regions of the United States unique?* Students read informational texts about the unique regions of the United States. Students write an opinion sharing reasons as to why one of the regions would be the best place to live.

Unit 3: Earth—*How has the Earth's surface changed?* Students read informational texts to develop an understanding of how the Earth's surface has changed. After doing so, students write a comparative essay that examines the effects of change to the Earth's surface as explained in a paired myth passage.

Unit 4: America's Economy—*How does the economy work?* Students read literary texts to determine how different characters have worked to overcome challenges in meeting their needs. Students use this information to write a narrative in which a character meets a need.

Examining the organizing centers for each unit sent clear messages about the overall organizing center for the curriculum:

- The curriculum was organized by topics related to content areas.
- The organizing center for each unit was communicated through a title and an answerable guiding question.
- The curriculum separated the study of fiction and nonfiction text by units.
- The culminating tasks for each unit were designed with the teacher as the sole audience for student work.

The school, however, was looking for a curriculum that integrated English language arts with content in a meaningful way, included units that allowed for the examination of fiction and nonfiction simultaneously, and provided the opportunity for students to engage in authentic and meaningful tasks. Given that the school did not have a choice in resources, they set out to make the curriculum their own and planned a curriculum using what they had learned about the organizing centers. The result was the following:

Unit 1: Survival— *What does it take to survive?* Students understand that survival is a recurring theme in literature and in life. Students read survival stories to identify and explain traits of characters who have survived physical challenges and other obstacles. They read informational texts about how animals adapt and survive in their different habitats. Students choose an animal to research and create an infographic for younger students explaining the survival instincts of the animals.

Unit 2: Regions— *Does where you live matter?* Students read informational text about the different regions of the United States and fictional stories set in these different regions. After reading the stories, they determine the impact the setting had on the story. Students choose one of the regions and create a resource that could be used by individuals who are deciding whether they should move to that region.

Unit 3: Natural Phenomena— *What really happens?* Students understand that over time both traditional stories and science have been used to explain how natural phenomena occur. Students read myths, folktales, and fables to learn how these traditional stories have been used to explain natural phenomena in different times and places. They read nonfiction texts that explain the science behind these occurrences. As a result of this unit, students write an introduction to a myth, folktale, or fable found in the school library in which they explain the connection between the science and the story.

Unit 4: Innovative Solutions— *What does it take to be innovative?* Students understand that innovative ideas often lead to creative solutions to personal, economic, and other types of problems. In this unit, students read fiction and nonfiction texts, including stories, editorials, and news articles, that provide examples of how people have used innovative solutions to solve problems. Together the class creates a definition of what it means to be innovative. The students identify problems that they have encountered in their own lives and choose one as the basis for writing a proposal that identifies an innovative solution that they can carry out as a class to solve the problem.

The result of the school's work was a curriculum that reflected the criteria they had established and that communicated what they valued. The lesson to be learned from this school is that there are steps you can take in the early stages of choosing or evaluating a curriculum, as well as when planning to design your own, that result in a curriculum that reflects what you value for your students.

Figure 1.1 is a tool that you can use for evaluation and planning. The chart contains space for six units of study and can be modified to reflect the number of units in the curriculum you are evaluating. Typically a year's curriculum can include six units, each approximately six weeks long. However, the length of a unit should be based on what students will learn and do, so all units may not require the same amount of time.

Figure 1.1

EVALUATING ORGANIZING CENTERS

Titles (List unit titles here.)	Unit Description (Identify any essential questions and big ideas; describe what students will learn or do during the unit.)
Unit 1:	
Unit 2:	
Unit 3:	
Unit 4:	
Unit 5:	
Unit 6:	

Once you have identified the information called for in Figure 1.1, you can use it to answer the following questions and evaluate the organizing centers for the curriculum:

- What are the recurring organizing centers used for each unit of study—topic, theme, concept, issue, problem, process, or phenomenon?
- How are the organizing centers articulated within the curriculum—title only; title and essential question; or title, essential question, and big idea?
- How do the organizing centers align to the values and focuses of the school as articulated through one or more of the following: the school’s mission and vision statement, the process and content standards, the learning processes, and the dispositions and habits of mind that are used to guide instruction?
- How do the organizing centers support student learning by creating appeal and then engaging students in meaningful, purposeful, and authentic experiences?

If the organizing center is narrow in focus, is articulated only through the title, and does not allow for in-depth analysis or reflect the values and

focuses of the school, it is an early indicator that this may not be the curriculum for you or that your existing curriculum needs revising. If you are designing your own curriculum, it is important to consider these questions before you begin.

Choosing the “Right” Organizing Centers

There is no one “right” organizing center for all schools. Answering the questions just listed will help you identify the right organizing centers for *your* curriculum. The most important of those questions is *How do the organizing centers align to the values and focuses of the school?* School values and focuses are communicated in many ways, including through the

- School’s mission and vision statement.
- Process and content standards that have been adopted by the state or local school board.
- Learning processes that have been the focus of school, grade-level, or department collegial circles and professional development.
- Dispositions and habits of mind used by the school to guide student metacognition.

Figure 1.2 includes several examples to illustrate the connection between school values and focuses and the organizing center for the curriculum.

Summary: Organizing Centers

An organizing center is the central idea upon which a unit of study is built. It is communicated through a unit’s title, essential question, and big idea. Quality organizing centers are built around themes, concepts, issues, problems, processes, or phenomena. They align to the values of the school as articulated through one or more of the following: the school’s mission and vision statement, the process and content standards, the learning processes, and the dispositions and habits of mind that are used to guide instruction. A quality curriculum will organize units of study around

Figure 1.2

CONNECTING SCHOOL VALUES AND FOCUSES WITH ORGANIZING CENTERS

School Values and Focuses as Articulated Through . . .	Related Organizing Center	Explanation
<p><i>Example 1: Mission Statement</i>—We believe that students should learn in a safe, supportive, and student-centered environment. We are committed to meeting the needs of all students, helping them to achieve academic excellence, and preparing them for a global society.</p>	<p>Schooling for All: <i>Does everyone deserve an education?</i> Students understand that not all children receive an education and how the lack of education affects the lives of these children.</p>	<p>This school's mission statement articulates the following goals for its students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, student-centered learning environment that meets the need of all learners • Academic excellence • Global society <p>The related organizing center connects to the school's mission statement because it provides students with the opportunity to learn about education in other communities.</p>
<p><i>Example 2: Social Studies Themes</i>—The National Council for the Social Studies identifies the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture • Time, Continuity, and Change • People, Places, and the Environment • Individual Development and Identity • Individuals, Groups, and Institutions • Power, Authority, and Governance • Production, Distribution, and Consumption • Science, Technology, and Society • Global Connections • Civic Ideals and Practices 	<p>Science, Technology, and Society: <i>Should science be controlled?</i> Students learn about the complexity of government regulation of scientific research because of religious, ethical, and moral issues.</p>	<p>The conceptually based social studies themes can easily be used as titles and narrowed in focus to specific grade-level content through the essential question and big idea. The concept of Science, Technology, and Society can be used as the unit title but is made more specific through the essential question and big idea.</p>

(continues)

Figure 1.2

CONNECTING SCHOOL VALUES AND FOCUSES WITH ORGANIZING CENTERS (continued)

School Values and Focuses as Articulated Through . . .	Related Organizing Center	Explanation
<p><i>Example 3: Common Core State Standards:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines <i>faction</i> in Federalist No. 10). RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. 	<p>The Power of Words: <i>Can we make a difference with what we say?</i> Students explore how authors have used language and structure to communicate strong messages that have changed how people think about the world around them.</p>	<p>Analysis of the Common Core State Standards for reading informational text in 11th and 12th grade in comparison with those in 9th and 10th grade indicate that the following skills should be emphasized:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points that are clear, convincing, and engaging. Analyze how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. <p>The organizing center for the sample unit focuses on these skills by emphasizing the impact of language and structure on a text.</p>

centers that are worthy of the time and energy set aside for their pursuit and that reflect the overall intent and purpose of the curriculum.

Tools and Activities for Evaluation, Design, and Revision

- **Evaluating Organizing Centers.** This tool (Figure 1.1) can be used either to identify organizing centers for a curriculum that is currently under design or to evaluate the organizing centers in an existing curriculum. Using it to plan or evaluate the curriculum will ensure that the curriculum is on the right track and reflects the values of the school.



Checklist for Evaluation, Design, and Revision

- The organizing center is articulated through the title, essential question, and big idea.
- The organizing center for each unit of study is a theme, a concept, an issue, a problem, a process, or a phenomenon.
- The organizing center aligns to the values of the school as articulated through one or more of the following: the school's mission and vision statement, the process and content standards, the learning processes, and the dispositions and habits of mind that are used to guide instruction.
- The organizing center supports student learning by creating appeal and will result in students engaging in meaningful, purposeful, and authentic experiences.

Epilogue

Those of you drawn to this book have the commonality of wanting to know what you can do to design, evaluate, or revise curriculum. Although your intended outcome—high-quality curriculum—may be the same, the reasons for your inquiry likely vary: new standards, new ideas about assessment, changing resources, state mandates, a desire to learn something new or understand curriculum from a different perspective. Whatever the reason, something prompted you to dig deeper into the curriculum design, evaluation, and revision process.

As an avid runner who came into the running scene in my early 40s, I felt a similar desire to learn more about my newly chosen sport. As I ran more consistently, in more races, and at further distances, I realized that simply getting out and running without a training plan or without paying any attention to the food I ate, the amount of water I drank, or the shoes I wore was not going to help me achieve the goals I set for myself.

My realization—that it is necessary to look at individual components, assess their quality, and improve upon them where necessary for overall success—applies to the curriculum evaluation and design process that I have set out in this book. My intention is to provide in-depth descriptions and tools for evaluating the individual parts of the curriculum to enable educators to determine what the curriculum does well and what it could do better, focus their efforts on the areas of greatest need, and improve the overall quality of the curriculum for student success.

As I prepared for my first New York City Marathon in 2014, I followed a carefully laid-out training plan, gave myself plenty of time to break in my sneakers, and experimented with different types and amounts of energy chews to find the right one for me. During the week leading up to the marathon, I ate the right balance of protein and carbohydrates while hydrating myself for the big day. The result was an awesome first marathon experience. The individual actions I took created a system (me) that worked well.

Making changes in the individual components—standards, assessments, and learning experiences—can have a strong positive effect on the curriculum. For example, ensuring that the curriculum-embedded performance assessment strongly aligns to the unit standards and organizing center can mean that students are engaged in assessments that produce and measure specific and deliberately chosen learning targets. However, if, in the process of aligning the curriculum-embedded performance task to the standards, the curriculum designers determine that one or more of the standards are not being assessed and do not either remove the standard from the unit or revise the performance task, the curriculum has not improved.

When one area of the curriculum is changed, it is vitally important to check how that change affects the whole. I learned this lesson the hard way when training for the 2015 New York City Marathon. I got sick three weeks before the marathon and could not run for a week. Instead of recovering and returning to the same training plan I had used the previous year, as was suggested in many of the articles I read, I tried to make up the time I had lost by running more. The result was not an awesome experience but, rather, an exhausting one. As I crossed the finish line, rather than feeling euphoric, I felt a great desire to lie down. I had failed to think about how the change in plan would affect the larger system.

A curriculum is a system made up of individual components. The entry point for the revision or development of curriculum will be based on the evaluation of each part of that system. However, it is important to realize

and accept from the outset that the revision of one component will more than likely lead to the evaluation and revision of another component. For example,

- Revisions to address standards' emphasis and placement may lead to the examination of assessments to ensure alignment.
- Revisions of assessments may lead to the examination of learning experiences to ensure that they support students.
- Examination of learning experiences may result in revisions to ensure that they address content, process, and dispositions as well as articulate what students will do, why they will do it, and what the teacher will have as evidence of learning.
- Examination of assessments may indicate the need to design curriculum-embedded performance assessments that include diagnostic and formative assessment opportunities.
- Examination of formative assessment opportunities may reveal a need to better identify and describe the formative assessment process.

These are just a few of the connections that you may discover as you evaluate your curriculum. It is a process that takes time if your desired result is a high-quality curriculum that promotes student success.

In addition to providing tools and describing the evaluation and revision process, this book also explains what to consider when designing new curriculum. On occasion, something happens—standards change, new resources are purchased, or district priorities and values shift—that requires us to start from scratch. As I approach my third New York City Marathon, I am recovering from an injury and unexpectedly find myself starting from the beginning. My plan is to use my previous experiences as well as new knowledge and a professional trainer so that my next experience is better than my last. So whether your intention is to evaluate and revise or to design anew, the tools and processes included in this book can be used with your vast and personalized experiences to create a high-quality and meaningful curriculum for your students.

References

- Anderson, M. (2015, October 29). Technology device ownership: 2015. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/29/technology-device-ownership-2015/>
- Bass, M. (Director), Powers, M. (Producer), & Michael Jr. (Performer). (2014, August 24). *Be the punchline!* BassCreative.com. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLA9Tfcj6LlbLLq6I-7rnCl6Q7JizoS1oa&v=w2MORc0ZCo8>
- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford.
- Berns, S. (Performer). (2013, December 19). My philosophy for a happy life. *TedX MidAtlantic*. Blueskymedia. Available: <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/My-philosophy-for-a-happy-life>
- Bilton, N. (2013, September 15). Disruptions: Minecraft, an obsession and an educational tool [Blog post]. Retrieved from *New York Times*, Bits at http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/minecraft-an-obsession-and-an-educational-tool/?ref=education&_r=2
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7–74. doi: 10.1080/09695980050102
- Blinder, A. (2013, November 21). Alabama pardons 3 “Scottsboro Boys” after 80 years. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/us/with-last-3-pardons-alabama-hopes-to-put-infamous-scottsboro-boys-case-to-rest.html?_r=0
- Brookhart, S. M., & Moss, C. M. (2014, October). Learning targets on parade. *Educational Leadership*, 72(2), 28–33.
- Brookings Santelises, S., & Dabrowski, J. (2015). Checking in: Do classroom assignments reflect today’s higher standards? [*Equity in Motion Series*]. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.
- California Academic Content Standards Commission (CACSC). (2000). *History social science content standards*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.
- Chingos, M. M., & Whitehurst, G. J. (2012, April 10). *Choosing blindly: Instructional materials, teacher effectiveness and the Common Core*. Washington, DC: Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings. Available: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2012/04/10-curriculum-chingos-whitehurst>

- Costa, A., & Kallick, B. (2000). *Discovering and exploring habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- EngageNY. (n.d.). *Pedagogical shifts demanded by the Common Core State Standards*. Retrieved from <https://www.engageny.org/resource/common-core-shifts>
- Fanning, K. (2011). All about the rain forest: Saving the world's rain forests. *Scholastic News: Inside the Rain Forest*. Retrieved from <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/rainforest/rainforest.asp>
- Goode, T. D., & Dunne, C. (2004). Cultural self-assessment [*Curricula Enhancement Module Series*]. Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.
- Hyerle, D. (2009). *Visual tools for transforming information into knowledge*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Lorain, P. (2015, September 10). Brain development in young adolescents. Washington, DC: National Education Association. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/tools/16653.htm>
- Martin-Kniep, G. O. (1999). *Capturing the wisdom of practice: Professional portfolios for educators*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Martin-Kniep, G. O. (2000). *Becoming a better teacher: Eight innovations that work*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Martin-Kniep, G. O. (2006, April). Assessing worthy outcomes. Presentation for the Assessment Liaisons Program, Albany, NY.
- Martin-Kniep, G. O. (2008). *Communities that learn, lead and last: Building and sustaining educational expertise*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- McTighe, J., & Seif, E. (2014, Spring). *Teaching for understanding: A meaningful education for 21st century learners*. Retrieved from <http://jaymctighe.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Teaching-for-Understanding.pdf>
- McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2013). *Essential questions: Opening doors to student understanding*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Moss, C., & Brookhart, S. (2012). *Learning targets: Helping students aim for understanding in today's lesson*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington DC: NGA Center and CCSSO.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy*. Washington, DC: NGA Center and CCSSO.
- New York State K–12 Social Studies Framework. (n.d.). Available: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>
- Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). (n.d.). *Get to know the science standards*. Available: <http://www.nextgenscience.org/next-generation-science-standards>
- Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). (2013). *Next Generation Science Standards: For states, by states*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

- Nitko, A. J. (2001). *Educational assessment of students* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Pahomov, L. (2014). *Authentic learning in the digital age: Engaging students through inquiry*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Perrin, A., & Duggan, M. (2015, June 26). *Americans' Internet access: 2000–2015*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Available: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015>
- Popham, W. J. (1999). *Classroom assessment: What teachers need to know* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Poverty's Palette*. (2004). [Digital images]. *New York Times*. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2004/05/07/magazine/20040509PORT_SLIDESHOW_1.html
- Scheurman, G., & Newmann, F. M. (1998). Authentic intellectual work in social studies: Putting performance before pedagogy. *Social Education*, 62(1), 23–25.
- Stiggins, R. J. (1997). *Student-centered classroom assessment* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Stiggins, R. J. (2008, April). *Assessment manifesto: A call for the development of balanced assessment systems*. Portland, OR: ETS Assessment Training Institute.
- Texas Education Agency. (2010, May). Social studies TEKS. Available: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=3643>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Webb, N. L., & others. (2005). *Web alignment tool (WAT)*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center of Educational Research, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Available: <https://www.google.com/#q=Webb+alignment+tool.+Madison%2C+WI:+Wisconsin+Center+of+Education+Research%2C+University+of+Wisconsin%E2%80%93Madison>
- William, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37, 3–14.

About the Author



Angela Di Michele Lalor is a senior consultant at Learner-Centered Initiatives, where her work includes facilitating schoolwide initiatives in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Her primary focus has been helping districts design high-quality units of study that incorporate meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students. In addition, she has worked with teachers to design quality assessments; link curriculum, assessment, and grading and reporting practice; differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners; and examine student work to move student learning forward. Her strengths lie in her ability to help groups of teachers work collaboratively to rethink and reflect upon their practices.

Angela has presented nationally at the ASCD annual conference. She published an article in the November 7, 2013, issue of *ASCD Express* entitled “Thoughtful Selection of Informational Text,” which provides examples of how to use informational text within engaging and meaningful units of study. Her article “Keeping the Destination in Mind,” in the September 2012 issue of *Educational Leadership*, includes practical tips and examples on providing students with effective feedback that will move learning forward.

Angela began her career as a 7th grade social studies teacher. She is a certified Fellow at Communities for Learning: Leading Lasting Change.

Angela is also an avid runner, having recently completed her second New York City marathon.

Additional information about Angela and her work is available on the LCI website, <http://www.lciltld.org/>, and LinkedIn, <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/angela-di-michele-lalor/7b/967/231/>. She can be reached at angelal@lciltld.org.