10

Aligning the Curriculum

Several different types of curriculum are at work in the school. When they are reasonably congruent with each other, student achievement is improved. This chapter reviews briefly the several types of curriculum and then explains how a comprehensive model for aligning these curricula can be planned and executed.

Types of Curricula

Seven types of curricula need the attention of the principal.

- *Recommended curriculum.* The *recommended* curriculum is that which is recommended by scholars and professional organizations. The best source for the recommendations of professional organizations is Kendall and Marzano **(1997).**
- *Written curriculum.* The *written* curriculum, as the term is used here, is the curriculum that appears in state and locally produced documents, such as state standards, district scope and sequence charts, district curriculum guides, teachers' planning documents, and curriculum units.

- *Taught curriculum.* The *taught* curriculum is that which teachers actually deliver day by day.
- *Supported curriculum.* The *supported* curriculum includes those resources that support the curriculum—textbooks, software, and other media.
- *Assessed curriculum.* The *assessed* curriculum is that which appears in tests and performance measures: state tests, standardized tests, district tests, and teacher-made tests.
- *Learned curriculum.* The *learned* curriculum is the bottom-line curriculum—the curriculum that students actually learn.
- *Hidden curriculum.* This is the unintended curriculum. It defines what students learn from the physical environment, the policies, and the procedures of the school. Here is an example. Each week teachers in an elementary school devote 250 minutes to reading and 50 minutes to art. Students learn this lesson: "In this school, art is not considered very important."

Figure 10.1 shows the relationship of these curricula as they interact with each other. Notice that the research suggests there are varying patterns of influence among the several types. The recommended curriculum seems to have little influence on the written, although districts seem to be increasingly concerned with state standards, especially if they are accompanied by state tests. **Also,** the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics **(1989)** seem to have had a significant influence in the development of district mathematics guides.

The written curriculum seems to have a moderate influence on the taught curriculum. Teachers report that they typically check the district guide early in the year, just to remind themselves what it includes. They are much more influenced by the assessed curriculum, especially if they are held accountable for students' results. Students are similarly sensitive to the assessed curriculum, as evidenced in the standard student question, **"Is** this going to be on the test?'

Teachers are perhaps most sensitive to the learned curriculum, making their decisions on the basis of students' needs, as they perceive them, and students' responses to the taught curriculum. Whereas conventional wisdom holds that teachers are textbook driven, the research suggests that the textbook is only one of several sources that the teacher consults in planning for instruction (see Brown, **1988).**

And textbook series often do not match closely the written curriculum because they are developed for a nationwide mass market. A relationship often exists between the written and the assessed curricula. Typically, the assessment is an objective test that samples low-level learning.

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Figure 10.1 Types of Curricula
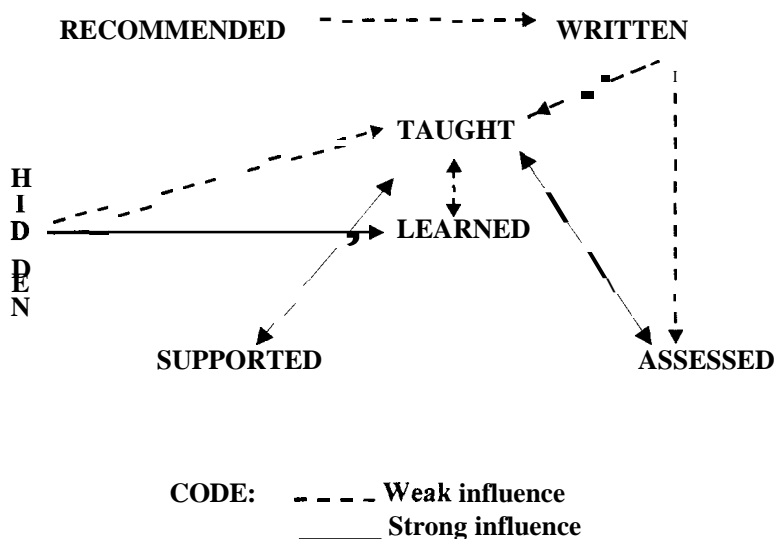
The hidden curriculum has a strong influence on what students learn. Even though students are not always aware of the impact of the hidden curriculum, they experience it every day. For example, an old building with holes in the roof and graffiti **on** the walls very clearly conveys the message, "People here don't care about this school."

These gaps have led experts in the field to recommend alignment processes.

English (1992), the chief advocate of alignment, emphasizes the need for a close match between the curriculum and the test. He explains that alignment can be achieved through "frontloading" or "backloading." Frontloading means developing the curriculum first and then finding a test to match; backloading means developing (or locating) the test first and then developing a curriculum to match.

I recommend a more comprehensive approach that involves the alignment of all seven curricula. The alignment process is best carried out at the school level. Even though a district or regional approach might be more efficient, the school-based process results in a greater sense of ownership and serves to educate the teachers about the details of the new curriculum guide.

- Are best learned when they are carefully planned
- Are essential for all students to master

These mastery objectives are different from what I have termed *continuing development objects,* those outcomes that should be nurtured on every suitable occasion, not taught in a specific grade level. Here is an example to show the difference:

- *Mastery:* Define **metaphor.**
- *Continuing development:* Enjoy poetry,

Mastery objectives should be aligned with tests and texts; organic outcomes need not be.

The complete set of mastery objectives should be stored in a computerized database, organized by grade level and then by areas within that subject.

3. Check to be sure that the district curriculum embodies the state standards. The state standards will surely be reflected in state tests; they also provide useful guidelines for local developers.

4. *Analyze the tests.* Using a printout of the mastery objectives for their grade level, the teams should then indicate on an appropriate form which of the mastery objectives are likely to be tested. An example of the form that can be used in this process is shown in Table 10.1. In determining which of the mastery objectives are likely to be tested, the team should analyze state tests, district tests, and standardized tests. They need not analyze teacher-made tests because the assumption is that teachers will test what they have taught. In analyzing those tests, the team can use descriptions of test content and tests previously given and no longer considered confidential.

5. Analyze the texts. The final step is to determine where the mastery objectives are explained in the text. The team should check the table of contents and the index of the texts used, noting the page numbers where the topic is treated. The team should enter page numbers only if the topic is treated in sufficient depth. Textbooks often treat topics so superficially that the text is of little value to teachers and students.

6. Evaluate the results. The alignment committee should review all the work of the teams, noting any problems that need correcting and pro-

TABLE 10.1 Alignment Form

Subject: English language arts   Grade: 9

Mastery Objectives	*Tested*	*Text: English 9*
Define, identify metaphor	x	pp. 123-126
Listen critically		
Write personal narrative	**x**	pp. 16-17
Hold interview		p. 14

ducing a complete set for the entire school. This complete set will be useful for the principal and supervisors.

7. Use the results. Simply completing the alignment charts has little value. The results should be used to accomplish two tasks. First, as noted briefly below and explained more fully in Chapters 12 and 13, teachers should use the list of mastery objectives to develop yearly and unit plans that ensure adequate treatment of all the mastery objectives. Mastery objectives that are tested should receive the highest priority in planning for learning; continuing development objectives likely to be tested would have a second priority. Second, the team should institute plans to fill in the gaps in the textbook. They can order supplementary materials or write their own materials.

Aligning the Written and the Taught Curricula

The alignment charts described above can be very useful in aligning the written and the taught. Next to aligning the taught and the learned, this is probably the most important alignment of all. Even the most conscientious teachers will need help in ensuring that they are effectively delivering the written curriculum. As explained more fully in Chapters 12 and 13, the principal should help teachers develop yearly calendars and unit plans. In developing such plans, the teacher should systematically check off the mastery objectives as they are scheduled in the yearly calendar and included in the unit. When the principal reviews these plans, he or she should check to ensure that all mastery objectives are in fact included.

Aligning the Hidden and the Learned Curricula

Because the hidden curriculum has such an impact on student learning, it deserves special study by the principal and teachers. The principal may therefore wish to lead a special task force to make a systematic analysis. Here are the main factors that seem to constitute the hidden curriculum:

- *Time allocation.* For example, are health and physical education allocated sufficient time to change the behavior of children and youth?
- *Space allocation.* How much space is allocated for teacher conferring and planning?
- *Use of discretionary funds.* Who decides? How are such funds expended?
- *Student discipline.* Do suspensions seem to reflect an ethnic bias?
- *Physical appearance.* Does the appearance of facilities suggest that those in the building care for the school? Are walls decorated with student artwork?
- *Student activities program.* Does this program reflect and respond to student talent diversity?
- *Communication.* Are most of the messages over the public address system of a positive nature? How often are student voices heard?
- *Power.* Do teachers have power in the decision-making process? Do students have any real power over the factors that matter?

When the analysis of the hidden curriculum has been completed, the principal and the teachers should identify those hidden messages that do not reflect what they want students to learn—and then work together to alter discrepant elements. For example, if the principal and teachers believe in the importance of students' artistic creativity but discover that the hidden curriculum reveals no traces of creativity, they might want to change the hidden curriculum by decorating the corridors with student artwork.

Aligning the Taught and the Learned Curricula

The final and perhaps most important type of alignment involves the taught and the learned curriculum. Whereas teachers mistakenly assume that students learn all that they are taught, the evidence is otherwise. As Doyle (1986) points out in his review of the research, for much of classroom time

students are either obviously off-task or feigning on-task behavior, only dimly aware of what the teacher is trying to teach.

This issue is so important that the principal and the teachers should discuss it in a faculty meeting or special workshop that would answer four questions: What is the taught/learned gap, and why is it important? What student factors cause it? What can teachers do to reduce the gap? What next steps should we take?

Nature and Importance of the Gap

The session should begin with an open dialog about the gap at their school. A simple definition should be helpful: "Students do not learn all that teachers teach. We call that the taught/learned gap." A brief discussion of its importance can follow.

Student Factors

The next part of the discussion is to examine the student factors that cause the taught/learned gap. Both the research and this author's experience indicate that the following elements are crucial.

First, students have limited attention spans. They have other agendas. The teacher may be doing his or her best to teach the parts of the amoeba, but student minds are on the weekend activities. All that television watching has conditioned them to expect one-minute messages. The physical environment may cause inattention. If the room is too warm, students will find it difficult to focus on a complex task.

Students may also lack knowledge and cognitive development. They are doing the best they can, but what they are hearing does not make sense. The terms are too difficult; the new knowledge is overwhelming. Students also may have special needs that are not being addressed. Even though they may not have obvious disabilities, they may have learning problems that interfere with their learning.

Peer pressure may also interfere with the learning process. This factor has a negative impact especially on economically disadvantaged minority students. They may want to learn, but a few powerful peers can establish norms that devalue learning.

Teacher-Facilitating Factors

In an atmosphere of inquiry, with teachers discussing their experience, the faculty should next analyze what seems to work. This discussion

should have a positive tone so that teachers do not feel they are being blamed. These productive factors are the ones that will probably be identified:

I. Clarify the objective.
2. Help students find meaning and purpose in learning the objective.
3. Encourage students to ask questions.
4. Use learning strategies that require a high level of student activity.
5. Use frequent quizzing to monitor learning and maintain high alertness.
6. Observe for verbal and nonverbal signs of off-task behavior.
7. Use monitoring data to adjust instruction.

The workshop should end with a discussion of what can be done to determine how much of a gap exists and what can be done to reduce it. The following process should be useful.

1. Teachers pair off or work in collegial teams.
2. Teacher A plans a lesson with the help of Teacher B; they also prepare a comprehensive quiz based on that lesson.
3. Teacher **A** implements the lesson, while Teacher B observes both student and teacher behavior.
4. Teacher **A** administers the quiz at the end of the lesson.
5. They meet to discuss the results.
6. They then switch roles.

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