



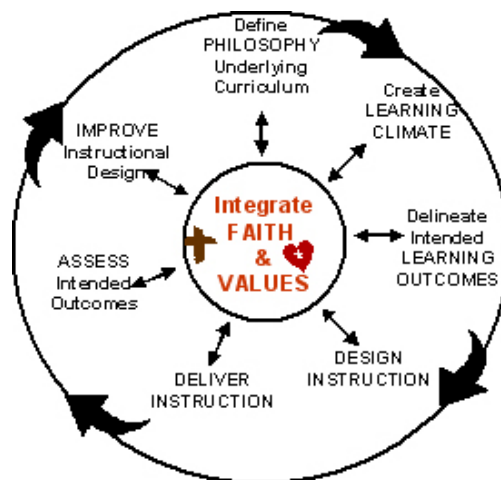
Curriculum...Everything that Goes on in the School

How many times have you, as a teacher, been asked by a parent: “*What is your curriculum?*” Did you scramble for Diocesan Curriculum Guidelines, State Curriculum Standards, or Parent Student Handbooks? Or did you open the door to your classroom and say: “*Here it is!*”

Obviously, curriculum is not that simple; in truth, it is a combination of all of the above. As a teacher, when you signed your contract, you committed yourself to embody the mission of St. X School. This implies, of course, that you follow the curriculum (here’s that word again!) of the school and/or the (arch)diocese. Is curriculum a course of studies? Is curriculum the textbook series that your school uses? Is curriculum your own creative strategies to help students learn? Simply stated, curriculum is everything that goes on in the school. What an awesome responsibility!

Dr. Gini Shimabukuro, currently Associate Professor of the Department of Catholic Educational Leadership at the University of San Francisco, has done extensive writing and speaking on the topic of curriculum. With her permission, I share with you a very abbreviated understanding of curriculum, with the hope that it will lead to a deeper understanding of curriculum for the sake of the children.

Central to Dr. Shimabukuro’s writings is a simple graphic entitled: “**Curriculum Development in the Catholic School.**” It consists of two concentric circles, the interior one labeled: “**Integrate Faith and Values.**” The outer circle consists of arrows pointing from one step in the curriculum development process to the other...and then in turn pointing inward to “*faith and values.*”



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This inner circle in what makes the Catholic school “*Catholic.*” Most schools today do a fine job in defining what students need to learn to become successful citizens, in delivering effective instruction, and in adequately assessing what students have learned...but it is in the integration of faith and values into every aspect of daily life in the school that defines the school as “*Catholic.*”

What does this curriculum development look like on a day-to-day basis?

The first step is to: “**Define the philosophy underlying curriculum.**” If curriculum is everything that goes on in the school, everyone in the school, from cafeteria worker to principal to teacher to maintenance person...**everyone** subscribes to teaching as Jesus did...by living the Gospel message.

The next is to: “**Create the learning climate.**” Children learn best in a safe environment, an environment in which they believe they are loved and valued, an environment in which they feel they can succeed. Everyone in the school, but the teacher in particular, is responsible for creating a learning climate that nurtures the child.

Only then can we: “**Delineate learning outcomes.**” This is where we usually begin with written curriculum...and this is where state standards, diocesan guidelines, and textbooks are helpful. The “*faith and values*” aspect, however, is where the Catholic school plays an important role. The school must ask: “*What does the student need to know when he/she graduates?*” That answer must have faith and values woven into academic knowledge and skills; otherwise, the Catholic school is not different where it counts.”

Now we are ready to: “**Design Instruction.**” If we, as Catholic school educators, believe that each child is created to be “*special,*” then we must design instruction, which best suits the learning style and modality of each student. Think of Jesus adapting His instruction to his audience!

Next, we “**Deliver Instruction.**” In delivering instruction, the Catholic schoolteacher exercises the primary role: coaxing, drawing forth, truly “educating” each child in a way that Jesus would do. We, of course, have updated ourselves professionally in a manner that assists us to deliver instruction effectively.

Although the next step: “**Assess Intended Outcomes**” is placed almost at the end of the cycle, if we are truly educating the student for life, this step should probably weave in and out of delineating learning outcomes, designing instruction, and delivering instruction. If we don’t know what the students should be able to do and know this all along, we cannot possibly design and deliver instruction in a meaningful way.

And finally, in retrospect, we: “**Improve Instructional Design.**” Just as assessment should be woven into the design and delivery of instruction, assessment of the entire curriculum process should be ongoing, so that as good teachers, we can improve how we do what we do.

This brings us back to the inner circle: “**Integrate Faith and Values.**” As Catholic school educators, this inner circle is what makes our Catholic school curriculum not only innovative and vibrant, but also faith-filled and transformative for our students.

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