4-1-2009

The Parallel Curriculum Model

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EDCI 590 Individual Research
Spring 2009

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Introduction

Students need to be able to make curriculum their own and teachers can help them do this by tailoring it to the student's individual needs. The Parallel Curriculum model can help teachers do this. This model can give students ownership of curriculum while guiding and making them become higher-level thinkers and learners.

A teacher trying to figure out the best way to design and deliver their curriculum can be very overwhelmed. With names like Burns, Erickson, Gardner, Kaplan, Leppin, Nunley, Purcell, Renzulli, Taba, and Tomlinson where are teachers to begin? To successfully implement the Parallel Curriculum model teachers need to first, know their curriculum. Teachers need to focus on the key components of their curriculum. After this is done teachers need to figure out what the specific goals they need to address and what their purpose is going to be. All of these components will give the teachers a very basic baseline of their curriculum. Teachers now need to decide how they are going to design their curriculum to meet all of their student's needs and promote higher-level thinking. They also need to include a plan on how it is going to be delivered.

Teachers might use Nunley's layer curriculum method. This consists of three layers of curriculum with one building on the other. The bottom layer is the basic layer, which would equate to a state's basic standards. Key concepts are found here. In the second layer a student would take the concepts learned in the bottom layer and start applying them. Critical thinking assignments would make up the top layer of this curriculum method. Nunley believes that the child should have the choice of how deep

he or she wish to examine the material meaning he or she would choose which levels he or she wish to work at (Nunley, 2001).

Gardner offers two methods on how knowledge can be taught. Mimetic education is basic. The teacher models the performance and the student duplicates it. Is information really being taught or is it a learned behavior? The transformative approach involves creativity. The teacher's act as a coach and encourages the students to work out their own ideas and then test them for further understanding (Gardner, 2004).

Erickson focuses on idea-centered curriculum, which centers on conceptual learning and getting students to think systematically. This will get students to support their understanding by using facts, which will lead them to gain insight on a given topic. Students will start thinking beyond the facts and start gaining an essential understanding of what they are learning. A key component to this type of learning is that students will be able to recognize the difference between generalizations and principles. Principles are the key concepts that will hold to be true. Generalizations only hold truth for given periods of time (Erickson, 1998).

VanTassel-Baska discusses models of reasoning when developing curriculum (VanTassel-Baska, 2003). Models of reasoning are meant to organize standards at more challenging levels in all subject areas. The two models she refers to are the Paul model of reasoning and the Taba model of concept development. "The Paul model identifies eight elements of reasoning that may be applied to oral and written activities: framing an issue, identifying purpose, stating assumptions, defining central concepts, delineating points of view and multiple perspectives, collecting and interpreting evidence, making inferences, and drawing conclusions and implications" (VanTassel-Baska, 2003, p.46).

The Taba model focuses on concept development. This model wants "teachers to integrate a higher-order concept, such as system, change, model, or scale, into relevant applications, categorical arrangements of applications, counterexamples, and generalizations across disciplines" (VanTassel-Baska, 2003, p.46). Both models provide students with concepts using high-order of thinking and scaffolding for understanding.

All of these researchers have excellent ideas regarding curriculum design, but how are teachers to choose just one. The parallel curriculum model is the answer. The parallel curriculum model takes the ideas of all the research that has been collected by these researchers and molds it into a flexible outline of how teachers can go about designing there curriculum. The parallel curriculum model also creates an atmosphere where teachers should discuss what it means to create curriculum that the learners of today will be able to use in the future. It promotes learners not only to accumulate information, but also to experience the power of knowledge and their potential role within it. This curriculum support students developing as they start making connections within the curriculum and start thinking like experts in that field. The parallel curriculum model can be differentiated for all student learners (Burns, Kaplan, Leppin, Purcell, Renzulli, & Tomlinson, 2002).

What is The Parallel Curriculum Model? The Parallel Curriculum Model is based on the theories of knowledge by William James 1885. First you start with the knowledge of. This involves remembering, recalling, and recognizing. Complex thinking does not usually take place here, and this knowledge focuses on essential knowledge and key concepts. Knowledge about is more advanced and involves interpreting, translating, and distinguishing. The knowing of key concepts and essential knowledge evolves into the

understanding of them. The highest level of involvement in a field is the knowledge how. This is where the student becomes the creator of knowledge. This is the application piece (Burns, Leppin, & Purcell, 2002).

The authors of the book describe it as unique because it is a set of four interrelated, yet parallel, designs for organizing curriculum: Core, Connections, Practice, and Identity. The core is focused on key concepts, key skills, and key understanding. These are the essential knowledge that a student needs to know and learn to succeed minimally. This is the foundation. Connections are where you tie activities and content together. Teachers want to design there curriculum in a way were the students will be able to build bridges among the curriculum. Students should be making connections across contents and within contents. In the practice parallel students work should be scaffolded to meet the needs of each student. Students need to be able to practice what they have learned and are continuing to learn. This is where the students begin their own individual journeys with the curriculum. Teachers need to give the students complex activities that will enable the students to start practicing the curriculum on their own. Lastly is the identify parallel. A teacher wants the student to be able to identify with the curriculum. You want the student to become self-aware. Visualization is key in this parallel. This will help the student to see there past self, current self, and future self. Simulations, self-analysis, reflection, prediction, and goal setting need to be taking place within the student at this parallel (National Association for Gifted Children, 2002).
A fifth grade teacher "imagined each of her students as a diamond. The model's four parallels – Core, Connections, Practice, and Identity – served as unique polishing tools to reveal the brilliance in each young person" (National Association for Gifted Children,

2002). The parallel curriculum allows the student and the teacher to see the whole and optimize and enhance learning. This model allows flexibility in developing the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. It allows teachers to "push" students to their highest potentials and students to "push" themselves. Curriculum should focus on complex structures, concepts, principles, and research methods. High-level thinking takes place from curriculum that is concept focused.

How does a teacher take all of this information regarding the parallel curriculum model and successfully implement it in the classroom? How can a teacher assess if the parallel curriculum model is promoting higher-level thinking?

Literature Review

The research mainly focused on literature and research from Carol Ann Tomlinson, Sandra Kaplan, Joseph Renzulli, Jeanne Purcell, Jann Leppien, and Deborah Burns. This group of people invented the parallel curriculum model and research on this topic without them seems non-existence. To date they have created a handful of books on the parallel curriculum model. Research began by reading most of the books that the above group of people authored. Then came the task of pulling information that was relevant to the project or that was interesting and would be helpful to a teacher. Articles dealing with the parallel curriculum model were found but not in great amounts. Most of the articles were from the National Association for Gifted Children. The articles gave an overview of the parallel curriculum model: what it is, who would use it, what is the purpose. Power point presentations were included from the National Association for Gifted Children, which also dealt with the CONN – CEPT grant that the Connecticut State Department of Education was awarded from the U.S. Department of Education. Another power point from the Center of Gifted Education from the University of William and Mary was also found amongst the articles. As with the books, a synthesis of the articles was conducted and information was chosen based on what would be useful for the project. Most of this information focused on defining the parallel curriculum model, gaining an understanding on how to implement it, and looking at the benefits of teachers using it to design their curriculum.

The Creation of the Parallel Curriculum Model

Educators want to challenge all of their students no matter what skills their students may posses. In this day and age in the field of education we hear such phrases

as “high standards”; “unveiling the genius in every student”; “rigor”; “meeting the needs of all students”; “challenging curriculum”. Educators are being questioned as to whether they are challenging all students. The Parallel Curriculum was designed with gifted and talented children in mind. Gifted and talented students tend to get looked over as a result of achieving good grades and being able to understand the curriculum. The concern was that these students are not being challenged and are not demonstrating what they are capable of doing. Instead of just creating more activities for these students to complete, the parallel curriculum model looks into students “intelligences” rather then their “intelligence” (Burns et al., 2002).

The research focused on using Gardner’s multiple intelligences to create more in-depth and rigorous lessons and units. This design leads to variability and supports a wide range in which students will be able learn in. The creation of lessons and units using this concept creates flexibility in how students can learn. It will also be able to help identify how other cultures define and view giftedness. Every student is unique and this characteristic played a major role in the creation of the Parallel Curriculum Model. Burns et al. (2002) characterized traits of all learners into three areas: abilities, interests, and learning preferences. The research stated that a student may have strong abilities in one area but their interests may lie in another area. These traits also connect with Gardner’s multiple intelligences especially dealing with the learning preference of the student.

The last part of the creation of the Parallel Curriculum Model deals with the three levels of knowledge. William James was the first to recommend the three levels of knowledge (Burns et al., 2002). Knowledge-of, knowledge-about, and knowledge-how

are the three levels. The knowledge-of level is basic. This is information that can be memorized, or identified easily. Knowledge-about takes the basic information a step further. At this level students should be able to categorize information, explain the meaning / concept of the information recognize patterns, and really be able to understand the information. The third level, knowledge-how, is the most complex level. Students should be able to apply the information to create new information. This level requires students to do in-depth thinking, and to act as if they are experts in the field in which they are studying. Students need to be able to bring that real world application piece into their studies.

The creation of the Parallel Curriculum has taken a lot of thought and process. The Parallel Curriculum model is based on research done by respected scholars that has been used consistently in the field of education for decades. Their research is timeless in a sense in that it is flexible enough to be tailored to meet the needs of students throughout generations. It is also reliable in that the core of the research has not changed just the implementation of it.

The Parallel Curriculum Model

The research of Burns et al. (2002) defines the Parallel Curriculum Model as a set of four interrelated designs that can be used singly, or in combination, to create or revise existing curriculum units, lessons, or tasks. Each of these four parallels offers a unique approach for organizing content, teaching, and learning that is closely aligned to the special purpose of each parallel. The term “parallel” was used to show that each parallel aligns with one another and they can be used by itself or in combination with each other. The use of a particular parallel should be strongly related to the learners’

character traits: ability, interest, and learning preference. Each of the parallels was designed with equal values and use in mind. The teacher and student have to decide which parallel is appropriate for a particular student's character traits. The parallels provide ascending levels of intellectual demand to meet the needs of the differences that exist among students. Each parallel is to provide a level of challenge to the student.

As a result of students have different styles, talents, interests, environments, opportunities, expertise, and different needs at different times in their lives four parallels were created. The four Parallels consist of the Core Curriculum, the Curriculum of Connections, the Curriculum of Practice and the Curriculum of Identity. The Core Curriculum addresses the core concepts, principles, and skills of a particular discipline. This parallel is designed to help students understand the basic, essential, discipline-based content. The content presented in this parallel is usual based on state and district standards. This is the foundation parallel and starting point for the other three parallels. The Curriculum of Connections builds upon the Core Curriculum. It is a plan that includes a set of guidelines and procedures to help curriculum makers connect overarching concepts, principles, and skills within and across disciplines, time periods, cultures, places, and/or events (Burns et al., 2002). Students using this parallel will learn how to think about and apply key concepts, principles, and skills to the curriculum. This parallel focuses on making linking between the curriculums. The next parallel is the Curriculum of Practice. The purpose of this parallel is to help students realize and be able to function as a professional in a particular discipline. In order for students to do this they need to display confidence and skill within the discipline. This parallel also helps extends the core curriculum. Students at this parallel should be able to understand, use,

generalize, and transfer essential knowledge, understanding, and skills within the discipline. The Curriculum of Identity is the final parallel and most complex. This parallel contains strategies and procedures to assist students in reflecting upon the relationship between the skills and ideas in a discipline and their own lives, personal growth, and development (Burns et al., 2002). Students will need to think about how their interests, strengths, preferences, and need for growth will help shape the discipline both now and in the future. Students will also need to think about how the discipline impacts the world and how the world impacts the discipline. Each parallel provides opportunities for educators and learners to explore areas in varying degrees of depth and difficulty.

Purpose for the Parallel Curriculum Model

The main purpose of the Parallel Curriculum is to provide teachers with a comprehensive framework with which they can design, evaluate, and revise existing curriculum. This is will help improve the quality of the curriculum units, lessons, and activities. In turn this offers both teachers and students the opportunity for nonstop professional, academic, and personal development. By using the Parallel Curriculum Model teachers will be able to have more elasticity to address the diverse needs and interests of the learners in their classrooms. Teachers may also be able to accomplish multiple themes and information by using this model. Overall the Parallel Curriculum Model will enhance the curriculum for all students and strengthen the need for all students to think deeply about the content and how they learn.

The Parallel Curriculum model is not just for teachers. Curriculum developers, grade level teams, subject area departments, inclusion teams, and vertical teams can use

the parallel curriculum model. The model can either be used in isolation by one teacher or by a group of teachers. The Parallel Curriculum Model can be used for all students, not just gifted students. It can be used for individual students, small groups, or even whole classes. As a result of the Parallel Curriculum not being part of the traditional mold of curriculum development, you find students whose abilities have often gone undiscovered because they did not fit that mold. This is the beauty of having such a flexible model.

Methodology

I began work on this project last semester when one of my professors suggested it to me. I had never heard of the Parallel Curriculum model but was familiar with some of the people who had done research on it and created the model. As I started exploring the research I realized that I was not so unfamiliar with this topic as I thought. The concepts that are present within the Parallel Curriculum Model I also use when creating my lessons. I don't get into depth with them as the Parallel Curriculum Model explains but I use the basic concepts. The Parallel Curriculum Model became clear to understand once I realized that I use the same basic concepts. Once a firm understanding of what the parallel curriculum model was and it's purpose established the project was ready to move forward. The two questions that I focused on were: What do teachers need to know to successfully implement the Parallel Curriculum Model? And Can the Parallel Curriculum Model promote higher-level thinking?

Since the project was focused on teachers using the parallel curriculum model in planning their curriculum, a survey finding out what knowledge teachers possessed of the parallel curriculum model was created. The survey (appendices 1) was handed out to 6th grade teachers of all disciplines in a middle school at a grade level meeting. As a result of the surveys, a handout was created (appendices 2) detailing what teachers need to know to successfully implement the Parallel Curriculum Model. The handout is very basic as a result of teachers mentioning that they wanted something that was simple and easy to follow. At the next grade level meeting a verbal presentation was done revealing the outcome of the surveys. Since the results brought to surface that many teachers had never heard of the parallel curriculum model a mini-overview of the parallel curriculum

model was conducted. I made mention that at the start of my research I was confused as to what the Parallel Curriculum Model was about and had to offer, but then once I was able to make a connection with the model it became clear to understand it and how to use it.

I then passed out the handout and an example (appendices 3) of how I used the Parallel Curriculum Model for one of my units. I explained that this is just one example of how you can use the Parallel Curriculum Model. The teachers were encouraged to use the model in both their own individual curriculum designs and as a team. I offered to help assist the teachers either individually or as a team with implementing the Parallel Curriculum Model in the creation of their curriculum design. I haven't had an offers yet but I think it was bad timing to introduce the model. I have gotten permission to reintroduce the Parallel Curriculum Model at the start of next school year during our grade level staff development. I think there will be more interest at that time of the school year.

The Parallel Curriculum does promote higher-level thinking. The purpose of the four parallels within the Parallel Curriculum Model is to promote higher-level thinking. No two students think or learn the same. The Parallel Curriculum Model allows flexibility for diverse learners. Students can push themselves to go and explore the curriculum based on what their teacher has created using the Parallel Curriculum Model. Each parallel is unique in how the curriculum is presented and learned. Spiral questioning is taking place within each parallel. Higher-level thinking varies among the four parallels as it does among students.

Analysis of Results

Designing curriculum into four parallels where clear-cut expectations are established is very meaningful and effective tool. The parallel curriculum model offers students and teachers the opportunities to really dig into the curriculum and investigate what is being learned. In this day and age teachers and school districts are so focused on making accreditation that they are not focusing on challenging students and making the curriculum fun and exciting. The parallel curriculum model can help teachers focus on the schools goal of achieving accreditation while at the same time designing the curriculum in such a way that students are interested and intrigued by it. Students can also guide themselves along the parallels and maybe even explore situations and areas of the curriculum that they would not have explored if designed in a different format.

While doing my research I gave a survey to the 6th grade staff at the middle school that I teach at. Twenty core content teachers took the survey. Core content means that they teach Math, English, Science, Social Studies, or Physical Education/Health. Teachers reported that they create their own lessons and units. Some teachers mentioned that they need to get their lessons and units approved by an administrator and sometimes have to redo them. This maybe the result of being a probationary teacher or a teacher who is struggling and on an improvement plan. While planning their lessons and units, the teachers mentioned that the school district has a pacing guide that teachers have to follow. The pacing guide acts as a timeframe as to when material needs to be taught. The timeframes are usually four quarters within a school year. This creates minimal flexibility within the quarter and really no flexibility in a school year. Teachers mentioned the frustration that they feel as a result of this and when students are not

grasping the material in a timely manner. The information on the pacing guide comes from a document called the curriculum framework, which is developed by the state. There was a mix of answers from the teachers when asked if they thought their lessons and units promoted higher-level thinking for ALL students. Teachers voiced concern that their lessons don't really reflect high-level thinking like they would like them to do. Results also stated that with the pressures of trying to get through the curriculum in time, that there is not enough time to develop lessons that really and truly promote and reflect higher-level thinking. Lastly the teachers were asked if they had ever heard of the Parallel Curriculum Model and if so in what context have they heard about it. Only one teacher had heard of the Parallel Curriculum Model and that was a result of attending the University of Virginia where Carol Ann Tomlinson is a professor.

The parallel curriculum model is still a relatively new concept that many schools have not explored yet. More and more schools are learning about it and becoming familiar with it, but research is lacking. There is not a wide range of research and data on the parallel curriculum model. This is a roadblock when trying to find data that either supports the model or criticizes it. There is not a variety of data sharing ideas on how to use the model or stating what works and what does not work. With the school stresses of designing a workable budget and accreditation, curriculum design has been pushed to the side. The research that I did find explained what the parallel curriculum was, how it was created, and how to use it. There are whole books dedicated to giving examples and strategies on how to use the Parallel Curriculum Model. It was helpful to be able to look at examples of how other teachers use the model and how curriculum designers organize the curriculum within the model.

Conclusions and/or Recommendations

The Parallel Curriculum model is an excellent tool for educators to use when developing curriculum. It promotes higher-level thinking and gives the students a chance to guide themselves in their learning. Using the four parallels of the parallel curriculum model gives both the teacher and the student a clear outline of what is expected at each parallel. The parallels can also create flexibility as to expectations a teacher may set for a student or students may set for themselves. This could lead to self-reflection for both the student and the teacher. Teachers need to have training on the parallel curriculum model to effectively be able to use it. Teachers also need time to create units and lessons using the parallel curriculum model. In the long run the parallel curriculum model may help students to be more independent, more curious about their education, and create students who are high-level thinkers.

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Appendices

Appendices #1

Survey to Teachers regarding curriculum design

1.) Who creates your lessons/units?

2.) How do you structure/organize what you teach?

3.) Do you feel that your current lessons / units promote higher-level thinking for all students? Why or why not?

4.) Have you ever heard of the Parallel Curriculum Model? If so, where have you heard about it and can you explain it?

Appendices #2

THE PARALLEL CURRICULUM MODEL

What is it?

The Parallel Curriculum Model is a way to organize curriculum using four parallels. The model uses a multi-layered approach so that the curriculum can be more adequately altered to meet the needs of diverse learners. It offers possibilities for constructing quality curriculum with multiple choices for implementation.

How do I use the four parallels?

The Core Curriculum – Basic / foundational curriculum belongs here. This would consist of state / district standards. A rich framework of knowledge, understanding, and skills most significant to the discipline goes here. This parallel is the starting point for the rest of the parallels.

The Curriculum of Connections – This is where students will interact with the curriculum. Students should be able to think about and apply key concepts, principles, and skills in order to make connections with the curriculum. Students will exam links between concepts and development of the curriculum.

The Curriculum of Practice – The purpose of this parallel is to help student's function with increasing skill and confidence in the curriculum as professionals in this field would. It promotes students' knowledge as practitioners of the curriculum.

The Curriculum of Identity – Students are to see themselves in relation to the curriculum both now and in the future. Students should understand the curriculum more in-depth by connecting it with their lives and experiences. This parallel is supposed to help increase the students' awareness of their preferences, strengths, interests, and need for growth within the curriculum.

**Can you see how using the Parallel Curriculum Model will promote higher-level thinking? **

Appendices #3

The Core or Basic Curriculum	The Curriculum of Connections	The Curriculum of Practice	The Curriculum of Identity
Roles of Civil War Leaders * Abraham Lincoln - Was leader of the United States - Opposed the spread of slavery - Issued the Emancipation Proclamation - Determined to preserve the Union – by force if necessary - Believed the U. S. was one nation, not a collection of independent states - Wrote the Gettysburg Address that said the Civil War was to preserve a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." * Jefferson Davis - Was President of the Confederate States of America	* Explain how Lincoln's view of the nature of the Union differed from Lee's. * Identify the similarities and differences between Lincoln and Davis. * What did Lincoln mean when he said "of the people, by the people, and for the people?" Does this relate to our government today? If so, how?	* After studying the ideas and philosophies of Lincoln what issues do you think he would support and what views would he have if he were to run for President today? * Find resources explaining on how Lee urged Southerners to accept defeat at the end of the war and reunite as Americans. Then find John McCain's concession speech from the 2008 Presidential election. Exam each and explain your findings. What kind of characteristic traits do these men have in common? Did their attitudes and beliefs set a tone for the nation?	* How did the choices Lincoln made during his Presidency affect your life today? * Pretend that you are Lee. Knowing what you know about the Civil War what would you have done differently? How would this change impact the war and life, as we know it? * If Lee took the offer to command the Union forces at the start of the war do you think the outcome would have been different? Give a detailed explanation using Lee's viewpoints to answer the question

Cont. * Ulysses S. Grant - Was general of the Union army that defeated Lee			

The Core or Basic Curriculum	The Curriculum of Connections	The Curriculum of Practice	The Curriculum of Identity
Cont. * Robert E. Lee - Was the leader of the Army of Northern Virginia - Was offered command of the Union forces at the beginning of the war but chose not to fight against Virginia - Opposed secession, but did not believe the union should be held together by force - Urged Southerners to accept defeat at the end of the war and reunite as Americans when some wanted to fight on			

Cont. * Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson - Was a skilled Confederate general from Virginia * Frederick Douglass - Was a former slave who escaped to the North and became an abolitionist			

The Core or Basic Curriculum	The Curriculum of Connections	The Curriculum of Practice	The Curriculum of Identity
Major battles and events of the Civil War. * The firing on Fort Sumter, S.C. began the war. * The first Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) was the first major battle. * The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation made "freeing the slaves" the new focus of the war. Many freed slaves joined the Union army. * The Battle of Vicksburg divided the South; the North controlled the Mississippi River.	* What are the ways locations and topography influenced important developments in the war, including major battles? * Why is the sequence of events important? * How did signing the Emancipation Proclamation impact the war?	* Pretend that you are either Lee or Grant. Analyze and interpret Civil War battlefield maps and explain the relationships among landforms, water features, climate characteristics, and historical events. * If could have chosen the location the capital cities of the North and South where would you have located them and why? What reasoning and strategies would you have applied to your discussion making?	* After studying all of the battles of the Civil War, explain why you think the Virginia Department of Education only choose the battles listed in the core/basic curriculum column for Virginia students to know.

Cont. * The Battle of Gettysburg was the turning point of the war; the North repelled Lee's invasion. * Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House in 1865 ended the war. **Influence of location and topography on critical** developments in the war. * The Union blockade of southern ports (e.g., Savannah, Charleston, New Orleans) * Control of the Mississippi River (e.g., Vicksburg) * Battle locations influenced by the struggle to capture capital cities (e.g., Richmond; Washington, D.C.) *Control of the high ground (e.g., Gettysburg)	* How did the location of the North and South's capital cities influence the outcome of the Civil War?		* What issues would cause a Civil War to break out today? What might be some similarities and differences between a current Civil War and the Civil War of 1862-1865? In what part of the United States do you think a current Civil War would be fought and how would it affect that area?