EdMetric LLC

ANYTIME ANYWHERE LEARNING

A Research-Based Approach to Curriculum Development

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The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020 brought into existence the unthinkable—completely virtual learning—for all children. The challenges of a virtual platform suddenly became a daily reality not just for the university student who may have already been acclimated to that form of learning (although it necessitated almost exclusive online learning for them too), but for the Pre-kindergarten through 12th grade learner—most of whom heretofore had only learned in a seated environment.

Universally and almost overnight, administrators, teachers, parents, and students found themselves in a locked-down environment. Most were unprepared, overwhelmed, and without the resources to offer their students what they needed to learn. Certainly, the largest educational corporations had products and services they could offer—at a price. But the corporate offerings left out a vital component—the classroom teacher with whom students had already formed a relationship. Enter EdMetric, LLC.

As an organization with a strong background in K–12 education and as one that sees the struggles teachers face first-hand, we felt a compelling need to produce a scope of work we could use to help schools through this pandemic. Taking into consideration the processes we used as practitioners, we conducted the research, created a plan, and developed a scope of work.

Like Alsubaie (2016), we believe strongly in *teacher* involvement throughout the curriculum development process for several reasons. First, school facilitators of curriculum writing (often a district administrator) cannot possibly know the content for every course as deeply as the content experts—from pre-kindergarten to dual-credit chemistry. Second, the teacher knows his/her students as learners better than anyone outside of the classroom—except perhaps the parent. It only makes sense to honor that expertise when building curriculum. Lastly, when teachers are directly involved in the curriculum writing process, their buy-in is heightened. They have skin in the game, if you will. Alsubaie expresses this more astutely, "If another party has already developed the curriculum, the teachers have to make an effort to know and understand it" (p. 106). That strong belief is threaded throughout the scope of work to include two in-person meetings and continual guidance throughout the process.

The work of Bill Daggett (2008) resonates with most educators since we know the importance of relationships when engaging students. As a result, a synopsis of Daggett's Rigor and Relevance Framework became the lead-off for the polished version of the scope of work. This reminder of the power of relationships, relevance, and rigor is poised to draw the educator into the hard work that comes when developing curriculum.

In 2001, Robert Marzano lit the education world on fire with his incendiary statement: "The sheer number of standards is the biggest impediment to implementing standards" (Scherer, p. 14). That single statement nearly twenty years ago, sent educators scurrying down the road of cherry-picking standards they thought were most likely to be addressed in the large-scale state assessment, or frankly, those they liked teaching. A few years later in 2003, Larry Ainsworth further clarified the work of prioritizing standards in his text, *Power Standards: Identifying the Standards that Matter the Most*. While his text provided educators with a better-defined process, the term "power" standards, did little to allay the notion that some standards were more important than others. More recently, the investigations of multiple researchers have focused the work to include the notion that all standards are taught, but some standards are taught more deeply— namely those that have endurance, leverage, and essentiality (DESE Task Force for Learning Acceleration, 2021). It goes without saying, the "power standards" teachers are scouring through are the standards formally adopted by the state.

In their new book written specifically to address the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning, Fisher, Frey, and Hattie discuss the importance of creating engaging tasks. While we would hope teachers always strive to create meaningful learning opportunities, when the omnipresent teacher is not physically present and distraction is just a mouse-click away, more than ever, teachers need to create activities that engage students behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally (The Distance Learning Playbook, 2021, p. 102). In this same text, Fisher et al. provide lists of virtual tools students may or may not find engaging, but more importantly they provide teachers the means to think through how one might design engaging tasks (p. 111).

In much the same way we ask teachers to produce engaging lessons, it's equally important they produce engaging assessments. Much has been written regarding authentic assessment. But as a guest panelist in a graduate course for beginning teachers, one EdMetric associate heard the questions asked again and again—how do we assess student learning? How can we rest assured our students are not cheating? These are fair questions—and ones most teachers are not prepared to answer. Their own experiences (as students and as teachers) with multiple choice or short answer questions, which may not contain much cognitive complexity, have simply not prepared them for assessing learning in a virtual environment. In many ways, this series of questions from graduate students warmed this educational Constructivist's heart. In 1993, Brooks and Brooks argued students should be assessed in the context of the teaching. In the same year, Dana and Davis maintained that "assessment techniques must permit students to express the understanding of concepts in ways that are uniquely theirs" (Holloway, 1999).

The assessments teachers produce in a virtual setting must be unique, and yet capture what a student knows and is able to do.

If we've learned anything acutely during a global pandemic, it's that Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is an absolutely necessity. Through organizations like the Collaborative of Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) we know SEL promotes equity, improves mental health, and fosters civic engagement (SEL As a Lever for Equity, 2021). In the 1980s, we would have called it teaching the whole child. Incidentally, social emotional learning need not be hard. It can be developed through relationship-building, literature choices, and direct conversations.

Although initially produced through what we knew as teachers and administrators, after the research was complete, a polished version of the curriculum scope of work was born and offered to school districts. Ultimately, the product is a vision of how EdMetric can lead districts through a researched and comprehensive teacher-driven process of creating curriculum units that ensure—Anytime, Anywhere Learning.

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