

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said:

“**Everything** depends on the person who stands at the front of the classroom. The teacher **isn't** an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. The teacher is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil, into the Promised Land, the teacher must have been there. “



“When asking themselves (the teachers) Do **I** stand for what I teach? Do **I** believe what I say? The teacher must be able to answer in the affirmative. What we need, more than anything else, isn't text books but rather **text people**. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that students read- the text that they'll never forget. “

When I first heard about the idea of Curriculum Mapping I thought to myself “ Oh no, here we go again!” How many times over the last 20 years in this systems have I sat in a room with my colleagues and wrote down what I thought was our “curriculum”? At least 4x in my memory. And where did all that work and time go? Into some filing cabinet never to be seen again.

I thought that this was another government “make-work” project. I have all my courses, units, lesson plans carefully organized in binders and on the u-drive; I do collaborate with my grade 6 team regarding our program in Grade 6; Why do I need to waste my time entering all this information digitally? I am happy to share my stuff with whoever asks.

And then I tried to map my first course onto Atlas.

I chose the course that is most current in terms of when I began teaching it (last year) and the course where I am using the most current educational strategies and assessments that I have been reading about, such as inquiry learning and project based learning. I thought, I will just attach all my documents to the map and I will be done. 15 minutes tops!

And then I began. Wait a minute...what is the essential question that I want my students to be able to answer after this unit? What enduring understandings do I want them to have after all this discussion and work? What levels of Bloom’s taxonomy am I hitting in this course? What outcomes and standards am I meeting in this course?

Pause.

Although I do much of this intuitively, after 36 years of teaching I found that I had to go back and rethink this course. I tweaked some lessons,

added more meaningful assessments and got rid of some activities that were creative and enjoyable but were not meeting any of the above criteria.

I thought: Maybe there is more to this mapping than just data entry.

This process tweaked my interest. I have always been interested in developing curriculum as a possible part of my career in education.

I was privileged to attend a professional development workshop at the head offices of Atlas Rubicon in Portland in October. With me were superintendents and consultants and a few teachers from all over the States- large school divisions in New York, Seattle, New Jersey and Portland. All were at different places on the continuum of curriculum mapping, most long after the data entry stage, everyone looking for ways to continue the professional conversation.

They told me about incredible collaborations that had occurred along the way. They told me about making time for formal reflective practices that were implemented that enhanced everyone's experience in education that hugely impacted students, teachers, administrators and parents. They told me about greater connections to outcomes and standards and much higher scores on achievement tests that are mandatory in the states. They told me about creativity and reinvigoration for veteran teachers. They told me about mentoring opportunities for beginning teachers.

I was intrigued.

I was impressed.

I could see the big picture.

We have much to be proud of in this school. We have excellence, a committed staff that goes way beyond for our students every day. But many of us live in silos in this building. Mapping will provide us with the opportunity to break down those walls that isolate us. We will be given TIME to have professional dialogue about our teaching practise. We will have a formal way of reflecting on what we do, and not just relying on our gut or our intuition.

A teacher commented to me a few weeks ago- I am willing to do curriculum mapping, I just don't really understand it."

I invite you open your mind and see what curriculum mapping can do for Gray Academy of Jewish Education- It can be our legacy.

Today we are going to try to begin this process again by ensuring that everyone has common language and understanding of the key concepts in curriculum development. We would also like to ensure that we are beginning with a common set of beliefs about curriculum that will be our anchor throughout this process. For those of you who are further along the continuum in terms of understanding the nuts and bolts and big picture of curriculum mapping, I would encourage you to be mentors and guides this morning for the rest of us who are at the beginning stages of this process. Just like in any classroom, in this room we have people with different learning styles and different knowledge banks. I believe that we all have what to learn from each other.

Hop on... let's start today with a growth mindset. Clean your minds of preconceived notions about curriculum mapping and let's begin.

