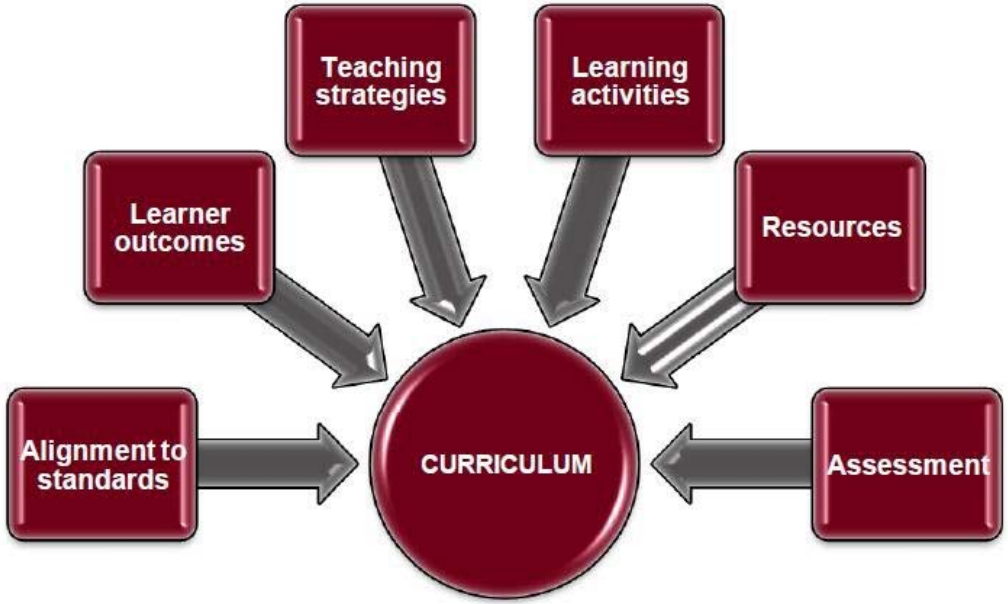
Exploring Curriculum

According to the Ohio Aspire *e-Guide*, "Curriculum is the way content is designed and delivered." A curriculum contains three primary elements: substance (what should be taught), purpose (why a topic should be taught), and practice (how a topic should be taught and learned). This definition unpacked indicates a quality curriculum should contain the following six components: alignment to standards, learner outcomes, teaching strategies, learning activities, resources, and assessments.



Why is it important to you? As a program administrator, you need to provide current and prospective students with a dynamic education program; as a teacher, you need to know what content to present, how you are going to present it, how your students are going to learn it, and how you are going to assess their learning; and as a student, curriculum provides an idea of what must be accomplished in order to make progress.

The challenge of curriculum isn't in defining what it is or specifying what makes a quality one, it's in keeping it current. It is this challenge that shows us that curriculum isn't a "one-and-done" experience. Curriculum is organic, a living entity that changes with the times, our student populations, workplace demands, expanding technology and so on.

How do we make sure our curriculum is up-to-, and not out-of-, date? First we need to make sure we have a curriculum. That's where knowing what makes a curriculum and how to build a curriculum come into play.

Building Curriculum

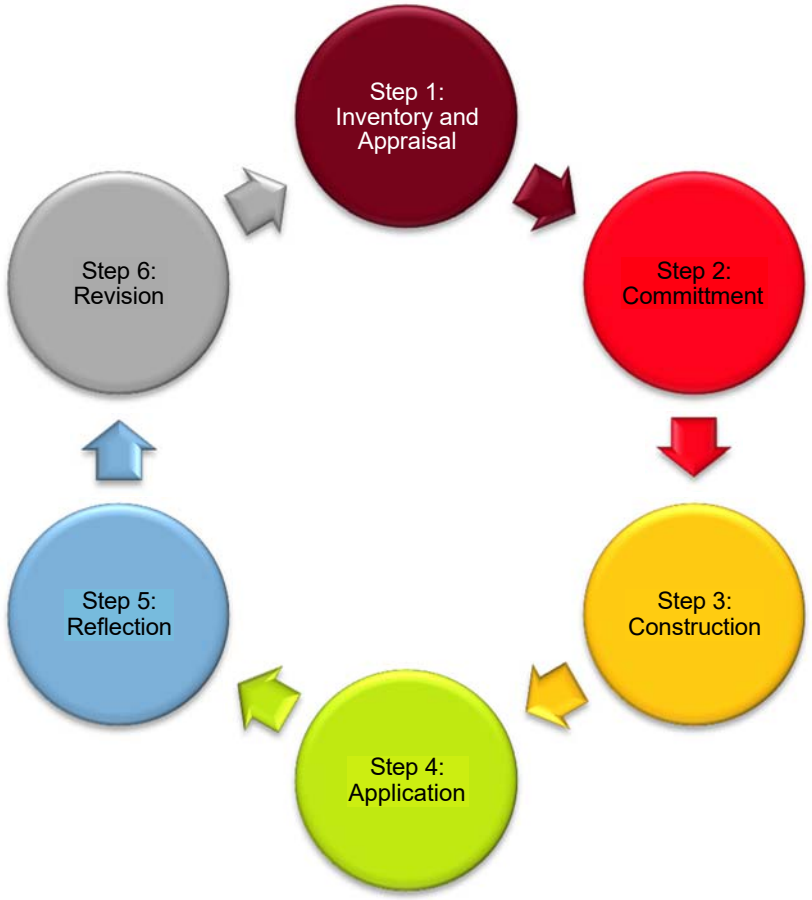
For most programs, building curriculum won't be a "starting-from-scratch" experience but since curriculum is constantly evolving, it's important to know the steps involved in the building process.

1. INVENTORY AND APPRAISAL – As teachers, you have already built curriculum. With the 2014 GED® instructional shifts and the introduction of the more rigorous College and Career Readiness Standards, it is time to review your current curriculum. Look at what you have and judge its value. Taking an inventory will reveal not only what you have but also where there are gaps and where what you have might not be working for you, your students, or your program anymore.

2. COMMITMENT – Commitment, the second step, involves people and time. Depending on the scale of what's being built, commitment might just be you or might consist of a team. The need determines the size and level of commitment.

3. CONSTRUCTION – The third step is the actual "building" of curriculum.

Again, for many of you building curriculum won't be a "from-scratch" experience. Instead, it will be time to review the lesson plans that make up the units of the curriculum. In reviewing, pay attention to the six components of curriculum: alignment to standards, learner outcomes, teaching strategies, learning activities, resources, and assessments. Do the lesson plans have these components? If not, start building. Do the lesson plans flow in a logical sequence that makes up a unit? If not, start building. Do the units make up a coherent and dependable curriculum? If not, start building.



4. APPLICATION – This is what you do every day — teaching. Since application is a daily experience, this stage takes time just like building a quality curriculum takes time.

5. REFLECTION – The fifth step occurs simultaneously with APPLICATION but only if you are committed to it. It's easy to teach and then move on to what's next, but without REFLECTION, how will you know if what you are building is truly what you need? Without REFLECTION, the final step, REVISION, is next to impossible.

6. REVISION – Building curriculum isn't a "one-and-done" experience. Curriculum is an evolving entity. The knowledge and skills needed 20, 10, or even five years ago aren't necessarily the knowledge and skills needed today. Because of this, educators must always have a keen eye on the future and anticipate and adapt to the changes needed in classrooms and curriculum.

The Curriculum Process: Inquiry – Framework – Mapping – Evaluation

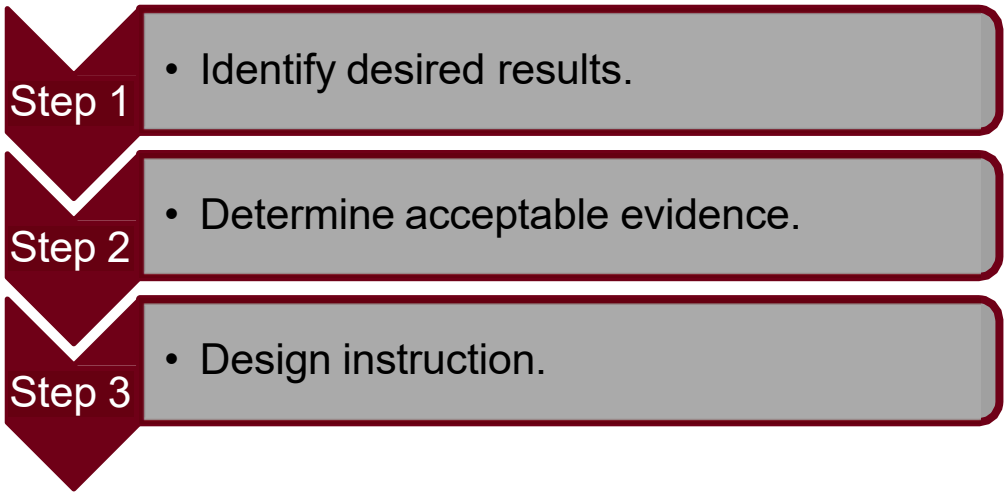
"Slow-and-steady upgrades or transformations, in which teachers work collaboratively to make strategic and specific modifications to current curricular elements, lead to modern, meaningful, and engaging experiences" (Hale & Fisher, 2013).

Modern, meaningful, and engaging experiences … does that describe your curriculum? Most of you have parts of your curriculum that need some REVISION but might not know where to begin the process of creating a quality curriculum that satisfies the "written curriculum" component of the Indicators of Program Quality.

The first step to revising is INQUIRY. Inquiry is the act of asking questions in order to gather information. As already stated, curriculum is substance, purpose, and practice, so curriculum INQUIRY is the act of asking questions about substance, purpose, and practice to gather information about the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of your curriculum.

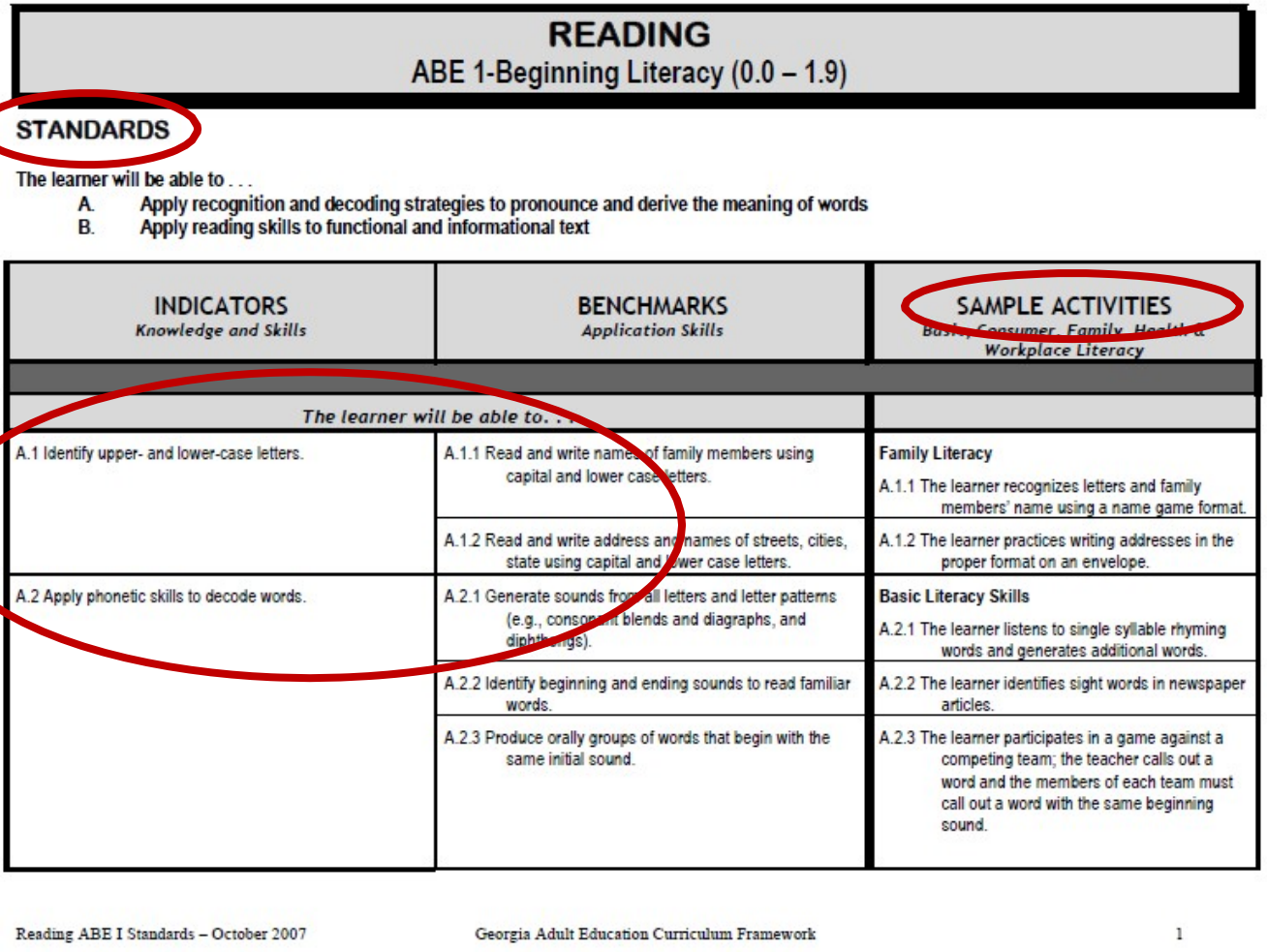
> To help focus the INQUIRY process, follow these three steps: IDENTIFY THE DESIRED RESULTS, DETERMINE ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE, and DESIGN INSTRUCTION.
>
> To IDENTIFY THE DESIRED RESULTS is to begin with the end in mind. For the lesson or unit in need of revision, answer this question: what is it students should know, understand, and be able to do?
>
> The next is DETERMINE ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE. In order to determine what students know, understand, and can do, you need to DETERMINE ACCEPTABLE EVIDENCE that will serve as proof of the transfer of knowledge.

Finally DESIGN INSTRUCTION. Here you decide what strategy you are going to use to teach, what activity your students will use to learn, and what resources are best suited to do this.



Once the INQUIRY step is complete, assemble what you've built into a FRAMEWORK, an organized plan that visually displays most of, if not all of, the components of curriculum. A FRAMEWORK serves as a guide for instruction and it indicates standards and content addressed, identifies learner outcomes, and supplies a variety of learning activities.

Here's an example of a FRAMEWORK from Georgia's Adult Education System (Note the inclusion of some of the components of curriculum.):



READING
ABE 1-Beginning Literacy (0.0 – 1.9)

STANDARDS

The learner will be able to . . .

A. Apply recognition and decoding strategies to pronounce and derive the meaning of words
B. Apply reading skills to functional and informational text

INDICATORS *Knowledge and Skills*	BENCHMARKS *Application Skills*	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES *Basic, Consumer, Family, Health & Workplace Literacy*
The learner will be able to. . .		
A.1 Identify upper- and lower-case letters.	A.1.1 Read and write names of family members using capital and lower case letters.	**Family Literacy** A.1.1 The learner recognizes letters and family members' name using a name game format.
	A.1.2 Read and write address and names of streets, cities, state using capital and lower case letters.	A.1.2 The learner practices writing addresses in the proper format on an envelope.
A.2 Apply phonetic skills to decode words.	A.2.1 Generate sounds from all letters and letter patterns (e.g., consonant blends and diagraphs, and diphthongs).	**Basic Literacy Skills** A.2.1 The learner listens to single syllable rhyming words and generates additional words.
	A.2.2 Identify beginning and ending sounds to read familiar words.	A.2.2 The learner identifies sight words in newspaper articles.
	A.2.3 Produce orally groups of words that begin with the same initial sound.	A.2.3 The learner participates in a game against a competing team; the teacher calls out a word and the members of each team must call out a word with the same beginning sound.

Reading ABE I Standards – October 2007 Georgia Adult Education Curriculum Framework 1

Curriculum MAPPING serves as a timeline of instruction by teacher and course. Not as specific as a FRAMEWORK, curriculum MAPPING can be useful in identifying gaps and redundancies in an educational program.

Here's an example of a yearlong curriculum map from Massachusetts:

Yearlong Grade 8 Mathematics Curriculum Map at a Glance

MATHEMATICS – GRADE 8		
MONTHS	**CONTENT**	**STANDARDS**
August/September (3 weeks)	Radicals and Irrational Numbers	8.NS.1, 2 8.EE.2 8.G.9 MP 1, 2, 6, 7, 8
September - October (3 weeks)	Exponents and Scientific Notation	8.EE.1, 3, 4 MP 6, 7, 8
October-November (4 weeks)	Congruence and Similarity	8.G.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, MP 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
November-December (4 weeks)	Functional Relationships	8.F.1, 2, 5 MP 2, 4, 6, 8
January-February (4 weeks)	Linear Relationships	8.EE 5,6 8.F.3, 4 8.SP.3 MP 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8
February-April (8 weeks)	Linear Equations & Simultaneous Equations	8.EE.7, 8 MP 4, 6, 7, 8
April/May (3 weeks)	Pythagorean Theorem	8.G.6 8.G.7 8.G.8 MP 1, 2, 3, 4
May/June (3 weeks)	Statistics	8.SP. 1, 2, 4 MP 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Sample Curriculum Map, Mathematics Grade 4 June 2013 Page 5 of 14

Aspire
LEARN MORE. EARN MORE.

The final step to revising is EVALUATION. Building and revising curriculum is an ongoing process and just like it's important to "begin with the end in mind" during INQUIRY, it's important to "begin with the end in mind" during building and revising. What is it you want your curriculum to measure up to? Take a look at this EVALUATION rubric and ask yourself where your curriculum fits.

CURRICULUM INVENTORY

Components of curriculum	Details	Does not meet	Partially meets	Meets
Alignment to standards	addresses Ohio ABLE Standards (ABE/ASE Content Standards)			
	identifies the core content			
	anticipates the requirements of college and career readiness			
Learner outcomes	address Ohio ABLE Standards (ABE/ASE Content Standards)			
	specify how the learning will be demonstrated			
	are tied to appropriate assessment strategies			
Teaching strategies	are learner-centered and inclusive of learner goals, interests, and learning styles			
	build upon students' prior knowledge			
	address appropriate learning levels			
	align with appropriate and research-based best practices			
	include combinations of individual, small group, and large group instruction			
	make effective use of technology			
Learning activities	assist students to develop skills through application for meaningful, authentic uses			
	allow for choice and flexibility			
	align with appropriate and research-based best practices			
	include combinations of individual, small group, and large group activities			
	make effective use of technology			
Resources	are screened for accuracy and authenticity			
	are relevant to the curriculum			
	are rich, varied, and derived from multiple sources			
	are age and skill-level appropriate			
Assessments	are formative and summative			
	inform teaching strategies and learning activities			
	allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in various ways			
	monitor, document, and certify student achievement			

References

Connecticut State Department of Education. (2006). *A Guide to Curriculum Development: Purposes, Practices, Procedures.* Retrieved December 19, 2013, from http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=321162

Smith, M. K. (2000*). Curriculum Theory and Practice.* Retrieved from http://infed.org/mobi/curriculum-theory-and-practice/

Hale, J. & Fisher, M. (2013). *Upgrade your curriculum: Practical ways to transform units and engage students*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. (1999). *Inquiry in Curriculum Design.* Retrieved from http://www.sfsu.edu/~teachers/download/Inquiryframework.pdf

Maine Department of Education. *Maine Adult Education Curriculum Framework.* Retrieved from http://www.maine.gov/doe/adulted/admin/curriculum/framework.pdf

Maine Department of Education. *Quality Curriculum Evaluation Rubric*. Retrieved from http://www.maine.gov/doe/adulted/admin/curriculum/quality-rubric.pdf

Technical College System of Georgia. (2007, October). *Adult Education Curriculum Framework.* Retrieved from http://literacy.myweb.uga.edu/curriculum/curriculum.pdf